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KEATS AND POLITICS

IN his book on Keats Professor Garrod six years ago glanced at an aspect of the poet which has been somewhat neglected, namely, his attitude to contemporary politics. 'More fully I think than we realize', he says, 'he shared with the poets his contemporaries the revolutionary conscience'. Though the word 'revolutionary' may be found to need some qualification, a close study of Keats's letters as well as of his poems gives convincing proof that he had a more active political conscience than has been generally recognized.

The years 1815 to 1821, in which Keats developed and matured his poetic powers, were years of stress and strain in the political and economic world. The situation after the Napoleonic wars was one which our age has no difficulty in understanding. The golden mirage of prosperity had vanished, leaving in its place the grey realities of heavy taxation, low wages, starvation, unemployment, and a universal discontent. It was not easy for any man to ignore this spectacle of suffering and disillusionment; and neither the origin nor the character of Keats disposed him to pass by unheeding. Owing nothing to birth himself and strongly conscious of his genius, he was little inclined to support the claims of hereditary privilege. True it is that on one occasion he spoke of his aristocratic temper and that, unlike some of his friends, he was not always at his ease with those of another class, but his sympathies were invariably with the oppressed. The evidence of those who knew Keats and the testimony of his letters reveal the gentle, kindly, and tolerant nature of the man. Nothing could be more striking than his love of justice and hatred of tyranny. Bailey says that 'a cloud never passed over his face, except of indignation at the wrongs of others'.

So gallant and generous a spirit was easily fired when it was brought into contact with the political writing of Leigh Hunt by Charles Cowden Clarke. It was the opinion of

Clarke that Burnet's *History of His Own Time* combined with *The Examiner* to lay the foundation of Keats's love of civil and religious liberty. The poet acknowledged his indebtedness to Clarke in the *Epistle* addressed to him, saying :

You too upheld the veil from Clio's beauty,
And pointed out the patriot's stern duty ;
The might of Alfred, and the shaft of Tell ;
The hand of Brutus, that so grandly fell
Upon a tyrant's head.

Professor Garrod's book makes it superfluous to examine in detail the early poems in which numerous passages establish the radical sympathies of Keats. They clearly show his dislike of the Holy Alliance and indeed of monarchs in general, the only one whom he singled out for admiration being King Alfred ; they demonstrate also his attraction to such patriots as Brutus, Kosciusko, and Wilhelm Tell, his passion for freedom and his ambition to write such poetry as should cause the patriot to

unsheath his steel ;
Or in the senate thunder out my numbers,
To startle princes from their easy slumbers.

However, in this connexion it might perhaps be mentioned that Keats's enthusiasm for Milton was due not only to his literary genius but also to his ardour for liberty. In his letters Keats alludes to Milton more than once with respect as a man of great intellectual power and as a superb type of the unselfish defender of freedom. In comparison, the Liberal leaders of his own time seemed to him as nothing. 'We have no Milton, no Algernon Sidney', he laments. Even the greatest men of America in his eyes stood on a lower plane. In spite of American republicanism and simplicity of manners, Keats was not enamoured of a Franklin or a Washington. He would concede them greatness but not sublimity, and asked, 'How are they to be compared to those our countrymen Milton and the two Sidneys?' The sonnet written in 1816 is therefore characteristic, when it describes Keats in patriotic meditation :

Musing on Milton's fate—on Sydney's bier—
Till their stern forms before my mind arise.

The austere strength of these men made him detest the blatant extravagance, luxury, and pomp of the rulers of contemporary Europe. This may be seen in various early poems, and we find a parallel in a letter dated 14–15 October 1818, where he criticizes the lust of politicians for outward distinctions. ‘Governors in these days’, he says, ‘lose the title of Man in exchange for that of Diplomat and Minister. We breathe in a sort of Officinal Atmosphere. All the departments of Government have strayed far from Simplicity which is the greatest of Strength—there is as much difference in this respect between the present Government and Oliver Cromwell's as there is between the 12 Tables of Rome and the volumes of Civil Law which were digested by Justinian. A Man now entitled Chancellor has the same honour paid to him whether he be a Hog or a Lord Bacon. No sensation is created by Greatness but by the number of Orders a Man has at his Button holes.’

Keats's civic ideals were no secret to his friends, and in the early poems there is enough evidence to justify the opinion of George Felton Mathew that ‘he was of the sceptical and republican school. An advocate for the innovations which were making progress in his time. A fault-finder with everything established.’ The sonnet attributed by Miss Lowell to Charles Ollier confirms the impression that in the circle of Keats's acquaintances he was regarded as the poetic champion of freedom.

When one considers all these facts, it is hardly surprising that the Tory reviewers should have fallen foul of Keats. They had marked their man, not merely as a literary disciple of Leigh Hunt, but as one whose work was inspired by political views which they thought obnoxious and dangerous, and it is a remarkable fact that after the mauling of *Endymion* Keats shunned politics as the theme of his poetry. Unless, with Professor Garrod, we are willing to see a reflection of the French Revolution in *Hyperion*, we must recognize that Keats jettisoned all those aspirations which had found

utterance in the epistle to his brother George.¹ How is this to be accounted for? Are we to attribute it to the effect produced by the reviewers, or, as is perhaps more likely, did not Keats himself perceive with singular rapidity the sphere in which his true genius could best thrive?

At any rate, it was not because his interest in politics had evaporated. There is ample proof of the contrary in his letters, an examination of which, before and after the appearance of *Endymion*, gives much information about Keats's political opinions. We see that he shared the distrust of the military power which had been so marked a feature of Whig and Tory alike ever since the days of Oliver Cromwell. Of course, the army of a hundred years ago was by no means the army of to-day, and not even the great victories of the Napoleonic wars could reconcile people to the private soldier, who was universally viewed with a chary and suspicious eye. In this respect Keats was no exception. When he visited the Isle of Wight in 1817 he wrote to Reynolds :

On the road from Cowes to Newport I saw some extensive Barracks, which disgusted me extremely with the Government for placing such a Nest of Debauchery in so beautiful a place. I asked a man on the Coach about this—and he said that the people had been spoilt. In the room where I slept at Newport, I found this on the Window—‘O Isle spoilt by the milatary!’

The same outlook is manifested in the verse epistle written from Margate to George Keats, when the poet describes the scarlet poppies among the oats :

So pert and useless, that they bring to mind
The scarlet coats that pester human-kind.

In another letter, written in 1819, Keats speaks with pitying contempt of ‘the soldier who is cheated into an *Esprit du Corps* by a red coat, a band, and colours, for the purpose

¹ This refers to his published work. Even in the unprinted poems there are only the relatively unimportant pieces *The Gadfly* and *Where's the Poet*, and possibly a few allusions of a personal kind to figures in contemporary politics in *The Cap and Bells*. Perhaps we should add the *Spenserian Stanza* written at the end of Book V, Canto II, of ‘*The Faerie Queene*’, though its date is uncertain.

of nothing'. With most people, however, the officers at least were popular. But Keats appears to have included them also in his dislike. Thus on his tour of 1818 he was irritated by their presence at Windermere along with dandies and fashionable women, for in these surroundings they seemed to him to strike a discordant note. Such being Keats's feelings towards the military, one wonders whether his annoyance did not prevail over his sense of humour when the postmaster at Port Patrick, seeing the strangely garbed pedestrian before him, took him for one of those privates whom Keats found so distasteful, and in answer to his inquiry for letters asked, 'What regiment?'

Nevertheless, Keats was not uninterested in the two great generals of his age, Napoleon and Wellington. So portentous a figure as that of Napoleon could not be ignored and Keats was obviously impressed by the force of his personality. When reading Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* in 1817, Keats noted various passages which might be applied to Napoleon and his fate, as when Eros says of Antony that 'he spurns the rush that lies before him'. In the same scene Keats marked the lines:

Let determined things
To destiny hold unbewailed their way,

and in the third act these words also struck him as significant :

I see men's judgments are
A parcel of their fortunes ; and things outward
Do draw the inward quality after them,
To suffer all alike.

Keats contrasted the steadfast bearing of Napoleon in adversity with Antony's conduct under the blows of misfortune, and observing the devotion of Bertrand to his commander, quoted an appropriate passage:

He that can endure
To follow with allegiance a fallen lord,
Does conquer him that did his master conquer,
And earns a place i' the story.

A certain admiration for Napoleon was a feature of some members of the Leigh Hunt circle, and in more than one number of *The Examiner* tribute was paid to his talents and a protest made against the treatment accorded to him. While pointing out the Emperor's faults, Hunt praised his liberality and wisdom. Keats, however, was far from subscribing to all the views of Hunt, for he saw Napoleon's limitations. In a letter written in October 1818 he divides men into two categories, those of a worldly, theatrical, and pantomimical bent, and those of an unearthly, spiritual, or ethereal temper. Among the latter he places John Howard and Bishop Hooker, among the former Byron and Napoleon. In the same letter Keats criticizes the attitude of the English Liberals and maintains that Napoleon has done more harm to the cause of liberty than any one else could have done.

In his judgement of Wellington Keats also displayed some independence. He was not of those who decried his capacities and belittled his work. In *The Examiner* for 4 May 1817 there was a warm eulogy of Wellington's achievements. The article pointed out the abuse and scorn, the sneers and ridicule under which he laboured at first, all borne with calm and dignity, until the scoffers were reduced to silence. Keats, writing to Haydon a week later, refers to this article and expresses his pleasure. 'A Man ought to have the Fame he deserves—and I begin to think that detracting from him as well as from Wordsworth is the same thing.' When one recalls the veneration with which Keats at that moment regarded Wordsworth, the tribute to Wellington is remarkable. True, in the same breath Keats finds fault with him for his lack of taste in certain directions, but however the poet might disagree with Wellington's political views, he never lost all respect for him. He would dismiss with contempt 'fat Louis' and the 'fat Regent', but no such derogatory epithet would he apply to the Duke of Wellington. The impetuous Haydon, who saw in Wellington the saviour of the civilized world and in Napoleon one who would have plunged it back into barbarism, might therefore count on some support from Keats at the dinner in May 1818, when

Hazlitt and Haydon debated the merits and demerits of Wellington.

If Keats was somewhat sceptical about Napoleon's contribution to the progress of the world, his letters show a still greater distrust of hereditary monarchs and their counsellors. Even in his remarks on an exhibition of pictures which he saw in Pall Mall in June 1820 we can see his hostility coming to the surface. There were portraits by Vandyck, Holbein, Lely, and Kneller, on the whole a goodly array. But among the unpleasant ones, says Keats,

there is James the First, whose appearance would disgrace a 'Society for the Suppression of Women'; so very squalid and subdued to nothing he looks. Then, there is old Lord Burleigh, the high-priest of economy, the political save-all, who has the appearance of a Pharisee just rebuffed by a Gospel bon-mot. Then, there is George the Second, very like an un-intellectual Voltaire, troubled with the gout and a bad temper. Then, there is young Devereux, the favourite, with every appearance of as slang a boxer as any in the Court; his face is cast in the mould of blackguardism with jockey-plaster.

As Keats's poem on the anniversary of the restoration of Charles II proves, he had no sympathy for this sovereign. He condemned him as an enemy of freedom and despised him into the bargain. Charles II appeared to Keats a singularly stupid ruler, and inevitably in his hero-worship the poet contrasted him with Milton. In a letter written on 24 March 1818 Keats compares the head of Milton to the moon, for it attracted all the waters of intellect to itself, leaving nothing for the unfortunate Charles. So far as the individual monarchs of his own day are concerned, Keats does not say much in his letters. The death of George III, who for ten years had wandered blind and mentally deranged through the chambers of his palace, was not an occasion to call for violent criticism even from one of Keats's political leanings. The poet merely wondered what would pass between King George and his critic, Peter Pindar, who had died a little before:

Perhaps the King may confess that Peter was in the right, and Peter maintain himself to have been wrong.

However, Keats could not refrain from a satirical glance at the anecdotes in the papers which told how the King nodded to a coal-heaver, laughed with a Quaker, and liked boiled leg of mutton. Neither the Prince Regent nor Louis XVI impressed Keats, but it would seem as if he were interested in the supposed vast designs of the Russian Czar. Writing to his brother George in America, he tells him of the rumours then afloat that the Emperor Alexander intended to divide his empire as did Diocletian, there being two other Czars under his control :

Should he do this and they for a series of Years keep peaceable among themselves, Russia may spread her conquest even to China—I think it a very likely thing that China itself may fall, Turkey certainly will. Meanwhile European north Russia will hold its horns against the rest of Europe, intriguing constantly with France.

For all this, Keats was most preoccupied with the effect which the sovereigns of the Holy Alliance were likely to have on popular rights. He remarks in October 1818 that they have learnt one lesson from Napoleon, how to organize vast armies. These 'divine right Gentlemen', who never have done or intended to do any good, will therefore do all the further harm Napoleon might have done without any of the good. Consequently, it was but natural that the assassination of Kotzebue should attract Keats's attention, all the more so as he was a writer. Kotzebue, who had at one time composed satirical articles against Napoleon, in 1817 began to act as a spy in Germany on behalf of Russia. From Weimar he edited the *Literarisches Wochenblatt*, in which he ridiculed those Germans who longed for free institutions. He was hated by all the young enthusiasts for liberty, and a student named Sand stabbed him on 23 March 1819. Quite casually Keats mentions this to his brother George on 15 April, in a budget of other news. He describes Kotzebue as 'the German Dramatist and traitor to his country'; he has forgotten the name of Sand, but adds that he stabbed himself immediately after the deed, crying 'Germany! Germany!' On 18 September Keats returned to the incident, for in Colnaghi's

window he had seen a portrait of Sand in profile. 'His very look', he says, 'must interest every one in his favour. I suppose they have represented him in his college dress. He seems to me like a young Abelard—a fine mouth, cheek bones (and this is no joke) full of sentiment, a fine, unvulgar nose, and plump temples.'

Though he saw clearly enough their connexion with the general trend of events in Europe, Keats, as was only to be expected, commented more frequently on matters nearer home. Politics were so vital a theme that they affected his opinion of other writers. The adoration with which Keats regarded Wordsworth underwent a change after they had met at the end of 1817. This was no doubt due in part to the personal shortcomings of the older poet, but also to his conservative views. He was on the wrong side, a supporter of the Government and the established order. We hear an echo of this disharmony during Keats's tour in the summer of 1818. At the moment the country was in the throes of a general election. Because of the high-handed measures of the Government in suspending the Habeas Corpus Act and in restricting the liberty of the press, feeling was bitter. One of the most important struggles was in Westmorland, which Lord Brougham attempted to win from the Lowthers. This challenge was unprecedented and there was great excitement. The inns were crowded, some of them with soldiers who had been brought there for the occasion, and Keats and his companion Brown had the utmost difficulty in finding shelter. Keats's sympathies were on the side of Brougham, as may be seen from the verses entitled *The Gadfly*, and when he learnt from the waiter at Bowness that Wordsworth had been there a few days before, canvassing for the Lowthers, he could only exclaim: 'What think you of that—Wordsworth versus Brougham!! Sad—sad—sad.' These circumstances doubtless explain the scornful reference to Wordsworth a little farther on in the letter. 'Lord Wordsworth,' he says, 'instead of being in retirement, has himself and his house full in the thick of fashionable visitors quite convenient to be pointed at all the summer long.' In a natural reaction from his

original enthusiasm Keats was evidently so much annoyed as to be somewhat unjust, but it is worthy of note that in spite of everything he called on Wordsworth. A similar temperateness is shown when Keats comments on Southey. His remarks arose out of a review by Hazlitt in *The Examiner* for 4 May 1817 of Southey's letter to William Smith, M.P. Hazlitt was merciless and Keats fully enjoyed the pungent criticism of Southey's tergiversations and the vigour of the writing. But there was a passage of which he did not approve. Hazlitt had said :

On the bald crown of our *petit tondu*, in vain concealed under withered bay-leaves and a few contemptible grey hairs, you see the organ of vanity triumphant—sleek, smooth, round, perfect, polished, horned and shining, as it were in a transparency.

In letters to both Hunt and Haydon Keats expressed the wish that this allusion to the grey hairs had been omitted.

If he took up so moderate an attitude to Southey and Wordsworth, Keats was not likely to support the wilder spirits in the politics of his day. However sincere his devotion to freedom, he was no lover of extreme measures. Many of the Radical leaders he suspected of a desire for notoriety, and even men like Leigh Hunt and so prominent a leader of the Opposition as Sir Francis Burdett he considered to be similarly tainted. Writing in October 1818 he says :

There are many Madmen in the Country I have no doubt, who would like to be beheaded on Tower Hill merely for the sake of *éclat*, there are men like Hunt who from a principle of taste would like to see things go on better, there are many like Sir F. Burdett who like to sit at the head of political dinners, but there are none prepared to suffer in obscurity for their Country. The motives of our worst men are Interest and of our best Vanity.

Towards the members of the Government Keats was naturally still more scathing. He could see nothing manly or sterling in them. On 17 January 1820 he uses the word 'Twang-dillo-dee', the 'amen to nonsense' as he calls it, and continues : 'My Lords Wellington and Castlereagh, and Canning, and many more, would do well to wear Twang-dillo-dee on their

backs instead of Ribbons at their button-holes.' For Castle-reagh in particular Keats had but little esteem, and he disparaged the minister's intellectual powers in comparison with those of Milton, just as he belittled the abilities of Charles II.

There was, however, one figure in the political world who, in spite of all his weaknesses, appealed to Keats, and that was the fiery, pugnacious William Cobbett. In a letter written on 4 March 1820, referring to Cobbett's standing for Parliament at Coventry, Keats exclaimed, 'Cobbett is expected to come in. O that I had two double plumpers for him.'

Though Keats never actually followed Cobbett's example, it is not without significance that at one time he contemplated taking a hand in political journalism by contributing to the *Edinburgh Review*. He hoped, as he said, to add his mite to the Liberal side of the question before he died. This was in September 1819, and it is a striking fact that though at that moment Keats was at work on some of his finest poems, his mind nevertheless strayed to the problems of the day. A letter written from Winchester on 18 September is of especial note, because it deals more extensively with politics than is Keats's wont. Looking back at history, he traces three great changes. The first was the reduction of the power of the nobles, when kings found it to their interest to be just to the people. The second saw a growth of royal power, when the nobles became the servants and adornments of royalty and there was a tendency to encroach on popular privileges. The English alone in Europe resisted these encroachments, and by the time of William III they were freemen. 'The example of England', Keats continues,

and the liberal writers of France and England, sowed the seed of opposition to this tyranny, and it was swelling in the ground till it burst out in the French Revolution. That has had an unlucky termination. It put a stop to the rapid progress of free sentiments in England, and gave our Court hopes of turning back to the despotism of the eighteenth century. They have made a handle of this event in every way to undermine our freedom. They spread a horrid superstition against all innovation and improvement. The present struggle in England of the

people is to destroy this superstition. What has roused them to do it is their distresses. Perhaps, on this account, the present distresses of this nation are a fortunate thing though so horrid in their experience. You will see I mean that the French Revolution put a temporary stop to the third change—the change for the better—Now it is in progress again, and I think it is an effectual one. This is no contest between Whig and Tory, but between right and wrong. There is scarcely a grain of party spirit now in England. Right and wrong considered by each man abstractedly, is the fashion. I know very little of these things. I am convinced, however, that apparently small causes make great alterations. There are little signs whereby we may know how matters are going on.

A series of incidents had occurred in the two years preceding this letter which had stirred Keats profoundly. They were largely concerned with the freedom of the press, a matter which was of particular significance to Keats as a writer and as an admirer of Milton. The Government had decided that the spread of disaffection was largely due to the printing press, and they determined to prosecute newspapers guilty of encouraging sedition. In April 1817 Jonathan Wooler, the publisher of an obscure journal called *The Black Dwarf*, had made an attack on the ministry, declaring that when they talked of patriotism they meant plunder, and that they had carried on war with France 'not to conquer that country, but ourselves'. Wooler was brought to trial in June, when he conducted his own defence with such vigour and eloquence that the audience applauded loudly, despite repeated threats from the officers of the court. In the end Wooler emerged triumphant, and the Government received a serious rebuff. Not deterred by this, in the middle of December they prosecuted another small publisher, named Hone, who had parodied the Litany, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Church Catechism, using them for political purposes. There was general sympathy with Hone, for it was felt that the prosecution was undertaken on political and not on religious grounds, and it was well known that distinguished members of the Tory party had themselves utilized similar parodies in party warfare. Hone was tried on one count on 18 December but, in spite of the

presence of the Attorney-General, and in spite of the direction of the judge, the jury acquitted him after only a quarter of an hour's discussion. The following day he was charged on another count in the presence of the Chief Justice, Lord Ellenborough himself. Again he was acquitted. The Government on 20 December pressed their charge, but, ignoring the opinion expressed by Lord Ellenborough, the jury declared Hone not guilty. The verdict was received with an immense outburst of applause, echoed by the crowd outside, and for several minutes the streets resounded with loud cries of joy. Keats was delighted with this failure to muzzle political criticism and, writing on 22 December to his brothers, he said: 'Hone the publisher's trial, you must find very amusing, and as Englishmen very encouraging: his *Not Guilty* is a thing, which not to have been, would have dulled still more Liberty's Emblazoning—Lord Ellenborough has been paid in his own coin—Wooler and Hone have done us an essential service', and in a letter a few days later he remarked with pleasure on the subscriptions being raised for Hone.

Two years afterwards there was similar excitement over the case of Richard Carlile, the bookseller. At one time he was an admirer of Wooler's paper, *The Black Dwarf*, and hawked it about the streets of London, walking as much as thirty miles a day, with only a few pence for his reward. Owing to his own printing activities, he later on incurred the displeasure of the Government, and by the end of October 1819 various charges had been preferred against him. His trial aroused widespread interest. Cobbett applauded, saying: 'You have done your duty bravely', but the Emperor Alexander, fearing the contamination of his subjects, forbade even a report of the trial to be brought into Russia. Keats, writing a few weeks before the event, states that he attaches great importance to it. Carlile

has been selling deistical pamphlets, republished Tom Paine, and many other works held in superstitious horror. He even has been selling, for some time, immense numbers of a work called *The Deist*, which comes out in weekly numbers. For this conduct he, I think, has had about a dozen indictments issued

against him, for which he has found bail to the amount of many thousand pounds. After all, they are afraid to prosecute. They are afraid of his defence ; it would be published in all the papers all over the empire. They shudder at this. The trials would light a flame they could not extinguish.

Keats was mistaken, and the result of the trial must have been a sore disappointment to him, for in November Carlile was fined £1,500 and sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

It is perhaps against the background of these attempts to curb public opinion that we should regard the Spenserian stanza which Keats wrote at the close of Book V, Canto II, of *The Faerie Queene*. Reading there of Artegall and Talus, the defenders of the established order, and of their victory over the revolutionary giant who subdued tyrants and overbearing lords, Keats felt impelled to record his faith in the triumph of freedom and equality by means of the knowledge derived from the printing-press.

In after-time, a sage of mickle lore
Yelep'd Typographus, the Giant took,
And did refit his limbs as heretofore,
And made him read in many a learned book,
And into many a lively legend look ;
Thereby in goodly themes so training him,
That all his brutishness he quite forsook,
When meeting Artegall and Talus grim,
The one he struck stone-blind, the other's eye wox dim.

Miss Lowell would have us believe that this is a humorous piece, but surely Keats was never more in earnest.

The year 1819 was remarkable also for the 'Peterloo Massacre', when a meeting of defenceless reformers, including many women and children, was mercilessly charged by the military, and the chief speaker, 'Orator' Hunt, was arrested. A storm of indignation swept over the country, and meetings were held in many towns. Keats refers to the incident in his letter of 18 September 1819, saying :

You will hear by the papers of the proceedings at Manchester, and Hunt's triumphal entry into London. It would take me a whole day and a quire of paper to give you anything like

detail. I will merely mention that it is calculated that 30,000 people were in the streets waiting for him. The whole distance from the Angel at Islington to the Crown and Anchor was lined with multitudes.

There can be no doubt as to where Keats's sympathies lay, for, writing again a few days later, he declared himself well pleased with these public demonstrations.

Keats was no political theorist but, as has already been abundantly illustrated, he had a keen sense of the traditional liberties of an Englishman and hotly resented any interference with them. Beyond that, however, he did not go. There is, for example, little comment in his letters on the wretched economic lot of many of his fellows. Here and there, it is true, he points out the poverty of those whom he encountered on his travels. In Ireland especially he was impressed by the utter raggedness, squalor, and misery of the people, and his allusion in this connexion to the sound of the shuttle as the most disgusting of all noises seems to indicate his dislike of the industrial system. But Keats was no born reformer. Such sights did not goad him into propagandist activity as they did Shelley; they reduced him to despair. He was not like his friend Dilke 'a Godwin perfectibility Man'. As his letter of 28 April 1819 proves, he even doubted if it were possible for man to achieve earthly happiness, discontent being part and parcel of his nature. Nevertheless, Keats was not merely a cold-blooded upholder of abstract popular rights, but felt the warmest sympathy with his countrymen. Having seen a crowd dancing in Cumberland, he said: 'There was as fine a row of boys and girls as you ever saw; some beautiful faces, and one exquisite mouth. I never felt so near the glory of Patriotism, the glory of making by any means a country happier.' A similar feeling recurs in a letter written some three months earlier in 1818, when Keats declares:

I like, I love England, I like its living men—give me a long brown plain 'for my morning', so I may meet with some of Edmund Ironside's descendants. Give me a barren mould, so I may meet with some shadowing of Alfred in the shape of

a Gipsy, a huntsman or a shepherd. Scenery is fine—but human nature is finer.

When Keats writes in this strain, who would refuse to believe his statement to Reynolds that for any great public good he would jump down Etna?

There has been a tendency to overlook the political aspect of Keats. Some critics have ignored it, preferring to rivet their gaze on the word-magic of his greatest poems. But to conceive of him only as the pale-lipped votary of Beauty is to distort the truth. No one will deny the absorbing zeal with which he worshipped at her shrine, nor fail to recognize the superiority of the poems inspired by this devotion. Yet even if Art was the object on which Keats's thoughts were most often bent, it did not exclude all other interests, and a knowledge of his attitude to contemporary politics is essential to a complete understanding of his personality. It adds not an inch to his stature as a poet but it increases our respect for him as a man.

From Keats's letters we perceive that his political views were maintained down to the end of his brief career with a notable tenacity and consistency. They drive us to the conclusion that his opinions were based on a genuine personal conviction and not, as is sometimes suggested, a mere echo of Leigh Hunt. If further evidence be required, we need but turn to Severn's account of his arrival with Keats at Naples in the autumn of 1820. The city was in a state of great excitement for, as a result of a military mutiny a few months before, the Bourbon monarch, Ferdinand I, had been compelled to yield to the desire for constitutional rule. 'We found ourselves', says Severn, 'in the midst of a constitutional government, with the people intoxicated and almost crazy with their unwonted liberty, which was, however, of the most ginger-bread kind, or rather all gilt and no ginger-bread'. The congress of Troppau having proclaimed the right of Europe as a whole to intervene where a revolutionary upheaval threatened, Ferdinand attempted to escape. He swore solemn oaths to uphold the constitution, and was then allowed to leave Neapolitan soil. His departure took place almost

immediately after Keats and Severn landed, and the two friends felt the utmost contempt for 'the perjured tyrant', who promptly broke all the pledges he had given. Keats did not live to witness the entry of the Austrian troops the following spring, the return of King Ferdinand, the restoration of an autocratic monarchy, and the subsequent imprisonment and execution of political opponents. But we can judge what his attitude would have been from an incident that occurred when he and Severn visited the theatre at Naples. It was the custom, as indeed was also the practice in England even in the eighteenth century, to have two sentinels on the stage, one at each side. The friends took them to be painted figures and admired the skill with which the work was done. But when, at the end of the act, the sentries began to move about, admiration gave place to indignation at what seemed to these Englishmen an insulting display of tyrannical power. 'Such was the debasement of the Neapolitan character', says Severn, that this outrage was actually permitted to pass without indignant challenge. This gross instance of tyrannical despotism was more than either of us could stand, so we rose and forthwith left—though not till Keats had exclaimed in a frenzy, 'Severn, we'll go on at once to Rome, for as I know that I shall not last long, it would make me die in anguish if I thought I was to be buried amid a people with such miserable political (debasement?)

Looking back from a distance at some of the political events to which Keats alludes, we shall not always see them in the same perspective as he did. The motives and the difficulties of the British Government are now more clear, and we are less disposed to join in a chorus of universal condemnation. Yet even if Keats's views at times appear crude, his hatred of despotism and oppression will command general sympathy. We feel it but fitting that one of so quick and generous a temper should now and then have turned aside from his life-task, the eager quest of Beauty, that he might lend a willing ear to the wrongs and sufferings of his fellow men at one of the great crises in their history. He was after all one of

those to whom the miseries of the world
Are misery, and will not let them rest.

HERBERT G. WRIGHT.

THE LIMITS OF LITERARY CRITICISM

I

ANY work of art that attracts an audience must provoke discussion, and all such discussion will be critical in some way. The oldest and still the most general form is a mere expression of like and dislike, 'I like it', 'I don't like it', an untutored impressionism. Macaulay describes this method in his own rotund phrasing: 'those profound and interesting annotations which are pencilled by sempstresses and apothecaries' boys on the dog-eared margins of novels borrowed from circulating libraries, "How beautiful!" "Cursed Prosy!" "I don't like Sir Reginald Malcolm at all." "I think Pelham is a sad dandy."¹ We are all doing it, Macaulay as well as the rest of us, pedants and sempstresses, or whatever we may be. But much else has been going on in this commentary on the arts from Aristotle to the present day. Recently two German professors, F. Walther Ebisch and Levin L. Schücking, made a bibliography of the most important books, articles, and commentaries on Shakespeare that had been written up to 1929.² They are insistent that their list is only a selection, and yet it cannot contain fewer than five thousand entries. This is a far journey from saying merely, 'I like it', and, 'I don't like it'. A similar elaborate scaffolding of elucidation and criticism has been erected around each of our classical writers, and I have been wondering what precisely is the relationship of this critical mass to the creative work. I enter not with a sense of disparagement for any type of comment from a glossary to a philosophical or aesthetic treatise: I seek merely to gain some perspective amid the various types of activity which accrete around works of literature.

When Aristotle wrote of poetry he thought of it as something that was spoken, an activity closely connected with

¹ Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays*, London, 1843.

² *A Shakespeare Bibliography*, Oxford, 1931.

dancing and music, above all, an eminently sociable activity. This comes through in his definitions: 'the reason for their original use of the trochaic tetrameter was that their poetry was satyric and more connected with dancing than it now is. As soon, however, as a spoken part came in, nature herself found the appropriate metre. The iambic we know is the most speakable of metres.'¹ We have lost that sense of literature as the spoken word. The point is brought out by W. P. Ker in speaking of Aristotle's divisions of poetry: 'Aristotle', he writes, 'is not thinking of poetry as published in books. Epic for him is not a certain number of pages filled up with lines of equal or nearly equal length; lyric is not a number of pages filled with lines of unequal length in more or less irregular stanzas. Aristotle thinks of epic as recited, of drama as represented on the stage, of lyric as a song with musical accompaniment. . . . One is apt to forget how artificial and sophisticated and, so to speak, civilised our idea of poetry is. For us poetry means the book-shop, or an hour or so on a winter evening before the fire, or on a summer day in the garden, over a book.'² In medieval times this spoken and social conception remained: its complete modification came in only with the invention of printing.

As long as this Greek, or this medieval way of literature prevailed, the elaboration of such commentary and criticism as we possess to-day was impossible. Imagine, for a moment, what our knowledge of Shakespeare would be if printing had not been invented. We should be dependent on a few copies of the plays in the hands of the players; we should have to go and see the plays performed in a theatre as the basis of our knowledge. All the critical controversy on texts, and chronology, and Shakespeare's learning, and his knowledge of law and botany would not exist. Similarly, we should have to hear our lyric poetry spoken or sung, instead of looking at the black, silent, printed symbols in the book before us. The printed word made literature learned and sophisticated: we lost the sense that it could be a social pastime. One cannot

¹ *Poetics*, trans. Bywater, 1909, p. 13.

² *Form and Style in Poetry*, London, 1928.

reconstruct the past : one can never call it back, and we have fresh victories to replace what has gone, but some quality has been lost from letters which can never be replaced since the days when one man sang to another such words as :

I

*Lully, lulley ! lully, lulley !
The faucon hath borne my make away.*

II

He bare him up, he bare him down,
He bare him into an orchard brown.

III

In that orchard there was an halle,
That was hanged with purpill and pall.

IV

And in that hall there was a bede,
It was hanged with gold so rede.

V

And in that bede there lith a knight,
His woundes bleding day and night.

VI

By that bede side kneleth a may,
And she weepeth both night and day.

VII

And by that bede side there stondeth a stone,
Corpus Christi wreten there on.

Those words give opportunity for every type of learned criticism ; the philologist can use them, the literary historian, the historian of tendencies, of form, and the psychological and philosophical critic. But something has gone out since the day when one man sang them to others and they said that they were good. The contrast is complete when we compare this with the whole mechanism of literature to-day ; the author, self-conscious, the victim or the child of publicity, the printed book, the publisher with his advance notices, his advertisements and reviews, and criticism with its unending

paraphernalia of commentary, and the silent reader, seated at home, like an anchorite in his cell, with the printed words before him.

II

I would attempt here to distinguish the nature of some of these methods of commentary and elucidation that have fastened themselves on literature since the sixteenth century.

Modern criticism began with two unrelated causes which happened to synchronize in time ; one was the printing-press and the other was the interest in classical literature which was part of the Renaissance. In the Middle Ages very little critical work was produced either by creative writers themselves or by those in contact with them. The only exception in Western Europe from late Roman times to the sixteenth century, apart from such a work as Bede's prosodic text-book *De Arte Metrica* and what may lie in the lost literature of the medieval period, is Dante's Latin pamphlet *De Vulgari Eloquentia*. The poets introduced critical commentary into their poems, but this was of an incidental character. But in Italy from the early decades of the sixteenth century onwards, the critical work of Aristotle, and of Horace particularly, is rediscovered. These renaissance critics have no uncertainty about the business of criticism ; for them the critic's function is to teach the writer how to write, and the generalizations of Aristotle and Horace are constructed into dogmatic principles for this purpose. The reflection of their work can be seen in Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie*, and in similar work in sixteenth-century England.

Whatever is true of literary criticism, one thing is certainly fallacious, and that is this contention, implied by so much renaissance criticism, that the critic can teach the writer how he ought to write. Formal criticism can, on the contrary, be a positive danger to the creative writer, as can be seen in the comparison of poems such as *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Faerie Queene*. Both poets are interested in form but in a different way. Chaucer has before him an elaborate narrative poem, the *Filostrato* of Boccaccio. He wishes to use that as

a basis for a poem in English. He has no preconception of what form his poem should be in: he has fortunately no critical dogmatist at hand to whom to turn for instruction. He absorbs as much of the design of the *Filostrato* as is useful to his purpose and then he allows his mind to work on the material. He creates form by the necessity of his poetical purpose, and so invents a new method in story-telling with such admirable welding of character and incident that nothing in narrative in England can be compared with his *Troilus and Criseyde* until we come to Fielding's prose novels in the eighteenth century, and Fielding with all his skill has, by some, been considered clumsy in comparison with Chaucer. Spenser also, in *The Fuerie Queene*, thinks about form, but he believes that literary criticism and a preconceived notion of the pattern of the ancient epic can help him. He is led not to a clarification of his purpose as a creative artist but to confusion. In imitation of the epic he begins his poem in the middle, without explanation, and leaves the work of elucidation to a prose preface. Again, in imitation of the epic, he develops intricate complications in the narration. Finally, in misconception of the intention of the epic, he adds a moral allegory that entangles any reader who pays much attention to it. I am far from attempting to deny the greatness of *The Fuerie Queene*; the beauty of its stanza, its diction, its world of 'mental space', its dream pictures, have attracted most great English poets since Spenser's time, but all that is confused within the poem arises from the renaissance belief that criticism has some formula that can teach one how to write or even how to construct.

One must admit that study and even imitation may help a writer, but such study must be personal and it need not be guided by formal critical knowledge. Chaucer shows frequently in *Troilus and Criseyde* that he is thinking how best he can shape his poem. For instance, he realizes that the wars of the Greeks and the Trojans are not essential to his story of the love of Troilus and Criseyde, and when he finds himself in danger of being drawn away to discuss them, he pulls himself up and writes :

But how this toun com to destruccioun
Ne falleth nought to purpos me to telle ;
For it were here a long digressioun
Fro my matere, and yow to longe dwelle.

Had Chaucer the formal critical knowledge available in Spenser's time, his poem might have been a pedantic confusion instead of a cunning, independently wrought piece of clear narrative.

I sometimes wonder what the history of English poetry, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, would have been had it never been perplexed with this belief that the critic can instruct the creative writer, and the pedant point the way to Parnassus. It must be admitted that this formal criticism set the poets at work in an ambitious way : the motive of fame which Milton admits as part of the writer's urge comes in as an incentive from this source. We are too apt, with our easy application of evolutionary principles to literary history, to believe that the way things happened was the inevitable and best way. For from all that formal discussion, what emerges but a mass of warped creative writing in epic and tragedy, with the mind of Milton alone triumphing, in a combination of critical precept and creative purpose, in *Paradise Lost* ?

Even the sense of ambition which this formal criticism gave to creative writers is not without its penalty, as can be seen in the history of the long poem in English. Most poets since the Renaissance have been persecuted by the Aristotelian precept that the long poem has some virtue in its very length ; Drayton, a natural lyrical poet, is driven to the ponderous *Polyolbion* ; Tennyson is waylaid from the short pieces which he manages so admirably in the 1842 volume into treacherous Arthurian material ; Browning attempts it in *The Ring and the Book*, and Swinburne in *Tristram of Lyonesse*. The critic was the will o' the wisp leading them from their poetic purpose into pursuit of that phantom epic. No one, until Edgar Allan Poe, had the courage to suggest that the short poem might have virtues of considerable importance. Poe even suggested that a long poem was a series of poetic moments

with flat intervening passages. One must view his dictum in the light of literary history to see how independent and courageous it was. 'I hold that a long poem does not exist. I maintain that the phrase "a long poem" is simply a flat contradiction in terms.'¹ To Poe even *Paradise Lost* is successful only as a series of minor poems with material that keeps them together. I am not prepared to defend Poe, but his attack upon the superior position occupied by mere length and size in poetical compositions was timely.

The danger of criticism for the creative writer can be seen clearly in the development of the modern novel from the work of Fielding and Richardson to the adventurous practitioners of to-day. The modern novel had the good fortune to be without a classical pedigree: Aristotle had not spoken on the novel for there was no novel to speak of. Renaissance critics had constructed no dogmatic principles on the essentials of the novel form for they were unaware of the wide ranging possibilities of prose narrative fiction. The result has been that, within the novel, the creative writer has experimented more with form in a short time than in any other branch of literature. There has been very little writing about the novel, less in England than in France and Germany: writers have written novels instead, and when we think of England alone, what variety of form and effect is called up by such names as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Clarissa Harlowe*, *Tom Jones*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Waverley*, *Emma*, *Pickwick Papers*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Wurden*, *The Egoist*, *The Woodlanders*, *The Wings of the Dove*, *Tono Bungay*, *The Old Wives' Tale*, *Sons and Lovers*, *Antic Hay*, *Ulysses*, and *Mr. Dalloway*. Would such freedom in prose narrative have been possible had the critics come in first and set up their prescriptions for the novel as the poets had prescriptions for epic and tragedy? It very nearly happened. Fielding, as all the text-books indicate, was toying playfully with the epic form in his plan of *Tom Jones*. One trick of his game was to put separate short stories into his novel to take the place of episodes in

¹ 'The Poetic Principle' in *The Complete Poetical Works and Essays*, London, 1888.

the epic. That piece of formalism clung to the novel long after its original purpose was forgotten. It entered even into *Pickwick*, and in *The Stroller's Tale* we find one of the strangest tributes to the pedantic renaissance traditions of formal criticism that exists in English literature.

III

I have been led to digress to show the danger of the critic for the creative writer, but the matter is worth a digression, for here one can speak with some certainty. Ignorance is often better than knowledge for the creative mind. Ignorance is certainly better than some sorts of knowledge. Too much knowledge, particularly of criticism, may lead to diffidence and to uncertainty. The creative writer must follow his own enthusiasms in books, and must be his own guide. He may find the source of his experience in bad literature as easily as in good, as Shelley did in the 'Tale of Terror' or Keats in the tame Spenserian stanzas of Mrs. Tighe.

Between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries literary elucidation and comment have extended into many activities which stand between the reader and the work of art which he wishes to examine. Along with the formal literary criticism, which begins in Western Europe with the Renaissance, there has developed from the sixteenth century the construction of literary history. In the Middle Ages literary history existed only in catalogues of writers and in the incidental comments of poets: even if they wanted literary history as we understand it, they lacked the material with which to construct it. In the sixteenth century it is very informal, merely a list of authors' names with the titles of their books often inaccurately given, and with many omissions. But in the eighteenth century the human mind reaches out in all branches of thought towards those methods of classification and cataloguing and synthesis with which we are to-day sufficiently familiar. It began with a poet, Thomas Gray, though he never got farther than planning his scheme and taking notes. It was continued by that strangely industrious Oxford scholar Thomas Warton, who between 1774 and 1781

wrote the first attempt at historical literary criticism in the modern sense, a study in which chronology, influences, periods, and groups all play a conspicuous part.¹ Ever since Warton, the writing of literary history has occupied an ever-increasing number of minds in Western Europe. The history of English literature has been constructed and reconstructed by Courthope, Taine, Saintsbury, Legouis, and Cazamian, and by writers working in droves, as did the constructors of *The Cambridge History of English Literature*. Apart from those who have applied themselves to the investigation of the whole story, there have grown up legions of sectionalists and specialists who have worked upon one aspect, or one part of an aspect. The academic instruction in literature, when it developed in the nineteenth century, attached itself, inevitably, to this aspect of literary studies. That such history has assisted the understanding of literature I am prepared to admit, especially in the matter of chronology and in the study of literary fashions, but we have had to pay a heavy price, first in the additional sophistication which has swathed itself around literature, and secondly in the mental deceit which surrounds all historical generalization. Even Saintsbury, who read more honestly and widely than any other man of his time, cannot sometimes avoid the cataloguing methods of a botanical bias, which in principle he would certainly condemn. To extract a single instance, we find that he writes at the close of a study of the Elizabethan period: 'all the seed of the whole period called Elizabethan was sown, and not a little of it had come up, before the Queen's death . . . the quality of the period 1580–1660 is essentially one and indivisible.'² Such language herds strong and individual minds together in conditions which would not be tolerated in a slum tenement. Literary history is always beckoning us away from books into movements and tendencies, to the study of 'romantic', and 'gothic', and 'classical'. We cease to think of the book in itself, and ponder vaguely of the book in relationship to

¹ W. P. Ker, *Thomas Warton*, British Academy, Warton Lecture, No. 1, London, 1911.

² G. Saintsbury, *A Short History of English Literature*, London, 1898.

something which comes before or after. So Chaucer, for some of the more egregious literary historians, becomes 'the dawn of the Renaissance', and Pope merely the supreme example of eighteenth-century artificiality. Historical criticism has tried to place writers in a sequence, and that is useful: but frequently the individual work has become subordinate to the sequence.

IV

Other complications have added themselves to literary history in helping to render intricate the modern approach to literature. The difficulty of obtaining accurate texts of authors has been envisioned, and an elaborate technique constructed for investigating the problem. In modern times the printer usually receives from the author a neat typewritten copy of the manuscript. This he sets into type by methods which are as exact as any mechanical process can be. The author corrects the printed text once or even twice, so that with a well-printed book in the twentieth century we possess, with a minimum of error, the actual words which the author intended us to read. But in early times methods were very different and the margin for error incalculably greater. In medieval times, if literature was set down at all, it was written by hand. The work was largely carried on in the *scriptoria* of monasteries, where writing in some monastic rules was a substitute for manual labour.¹ Each scribe brought in his own crop of errors, and no one need blame him when we remember how difficult it is to transcribe accurately and how cold the *scriptorium* must often have been in winter. One Bavarian monk writes on his manuscript that 'he was stiff with cold, while he wrote, and what he could not write by the light of the sun, he completed by the light of the moon'.² When one comes to a well-known piece of medieval literature the manuscripts will be numerous and probably all different. Professor R. W. Chambers and Professor Grattan have been

¹ G. H. Putnam, *Books and their Makers during the Middle Ages*, New York, 1896.

² Putnam, loc. cit.

engaged for over twenty years in attempting to establish the text of Langland's *Piers Plowman*. They find that there are 'fifty-one known MSS. of *Piers Plowman*', and that they all have variant readings.¹

Books written and issued after the introduction of printing have naturally a greater degree of accuracy. But in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries many writers seem to have been indifferent as to the fate of their volumes in the printing-house. The profits of literary labour were small and the sense of literary property ill developed. This leads at times to such confusion in the printed texts that it is difficult to perceive what the writer intended to set down. Particularly is this so in the texts of the Elizabethan drama. The manuscript was presumably the property of the company to which the author belonged, and was kept at the theatre. Before it went to the printing-house it was scored with alterations and deletions. In the printing-house itself inexact methods prevailed and, unless the author was an unusually careful man, like Ben Jonson, he did not trouble to look at the text before it was printed. Sometimes the author's copy never went to the printing-house; the text was obtained by more devious methods which led to inevitable inaccuracy. From a comparison of various editions of Shakespeare's plays we can see how great the divergencies of the text in the processes of transmission can become. Sometimes the differences are small and do not affect the central meaning, but sometimes, as in the first and second Quartos of *Hamlet*, they are so numerous and so important that they affect the whole meaning and intention of the play. Modern literary criticism has faced this problem and asserted that the texts of literature must be produced as exactly as possible before any criticism of their content can be allowed. This development of literary study has been made possible by the emergence of scientific bibliography. The principle of textual accuracy is dimly conceived as a purpose as far as the English classics are concerned in the eighteenth century. It is developed, but on methods

¹ 'The Text of *Piers Plowman*', Chambers and Grattan, *Modern Language Review*, Jan. 1931.

which would now be regarded as insufficient, in the nineteenth century. In its modern form, and with the methods of scientific research as its model, it is essentially a study of the twentieth century. The function of bibliography is to tell, as exactly as possible, how any given text has come into being. Its purposes have been described by one of its most distinguished modern practitioners, Dr. W. W. Greg, and the language he uses is interesting and precise. 'Bibliography', he writes, 'may be defined as the systematic study of the transmission of the written word whether through manuscript or print and it aims at the evolution of a critical organon by which the utmost possible results may be extracted from the available evidence. It forms the greater and most essential part of the duty of the editor, but its value in criticism is by no means confined to the editor. It will be found of service in every field of investigation, and cannot be neglected even by the "aesthetic" critic without loss.' And again he writes, 'Bibliography is the study of the material transmission of literary and other documents; its ultimate aim is to solve the problems of origin, history, and text, in so far as this can be achieved through minute investigation of the material means of transmission'.¹ Dr. Greg admits that in attempting to clarify the texts, bibliographical method has added to the complexity of literary studies.² Yet whatever the complications, no one can deny that the science of bibliography is an essential ancillary study to the art of criticism.

During the last thirty years the bibliographer has cleared up many dark places in the textual information on literature, but he has not always been content to interpret his function modestly. He has grown self-conscious and theoretical, and in his more speculative moods he has reduced literature, particularly sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century literature, into a Daedalian labyrinth of complication. It is time for those who study literature as an art, who wish to find all that can be felt and understood in any given composition, to estimate what their relation to this bibliographical work is to

¹ *The Teaching of English in England*.

² *The Library*, vol. xi, No. 3, December, 1930.

be. I would, for myself, distinguish between sober bibliography, which must modify my critical judgements, and speculation, arising from bibliographical methods, which seems more often to obscure judgement than to clarify it. Two examples, both taken from the study of Shakespearian texts, will illustrate the contrast of method and intention. First, I would consider the discovery of the exact origin of those texts known as the Jaggard Quartos as a contribution to sober bibliography. Eight of the plays of Shakespeare printed in quarto have various dates on them, 1600, 1608, and 1619. They were thought until quite recently to have been printed at the dates marked upon them, and those with the dates 1600 and 1608 had such authority as belongs to copies printed in Shakespeare's lifetime. But the work of a number of bibliographers¹ has shown that all these texts were published in 1619. This piece of work is not indefinite or speculative, nor does it admit of the intrusion of subjective elements: it has been proved in the same way, from rational deduction from fact, as things are proved in scientific investigation. Such an investigation is of value in the establishment of a text for Shakespeare's plays. Its results must be noted and accepted by critics whatever method of approach to literature they favour. The difficulty is to distinguish between such sober bibliography, and theoretical, or one might even say metaphysical, bibliography. This imaginative bibliography attempts not only to tell us the relative value of existing texts but, by an amalgam of bibliographical knowledge and of literary and psychological insight, to construct the very history of the way in which the manuscript of any given Shakespearian play was constructed. Professor Dover Wilson has been an outstanding exponent of this school. He has brought wide knowledge of bibliographical method and keen literary judgement to his task, but the superstructure of theory which he imposes upon the text of a single play is only doubtfully warranted by the evidence and is an intricate mixture of fact and speculation. Sir E. K. Chambers² summarizes in this way Professor Dover Wilson's conclusions

¹ A. W. Pollard, W. W. Greg, and Niedig.

² *Disintegration of Shakespeare*, British Academy, London, 1924.

from an examination of *The Tempest*: 'it has had a pre-history and a post-history. Substantially, it is a late recast by Shakespeare of an earlier play, perhaps his own, and at this recast matter originally played in scenes before the wreck has been put into narrative form. Then the recast has itself been abridged, mainly by Shakespeare, and into the abridgement has been inserted the mask, the authorship of which is left undetermined.' No one has ever attempted to suggest that such conclusions have the definiteness of conclusion based on fact. No one has attempted to show what value such theory has for criticism. If such study is in any true sense preparatory for a critical method, it is a critical method that has not so far been explored. Bibliography can, of course, be studied as an end in itself, and as such there need be no limit to its intricacy and no end to the complications of theory which its more adventurous adherents may build upon the given nucleus of fact. But for those who approach literature as an art there is a point at which the reduplication of theory leads only to confusion. The text becomes a palimpsest obscured by the layers of pseudo-clarifying theory.

V

Apart from the complications which have arisen from these detailed studies associated with the text, there arises another formidable intricacy in the intrusion of psychological methods into the study of literature. In its more modern forms this is a product of the last thirty years, but psychology, whether by that name or as a branch of philosophy, has influenced modern literary criticism since the days when Addison first read Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and wrote as a consequence his *Spectator* essays on 'The Pleasures of the Imagination'.

The psychologist enters into literary studies for two distinct purposes. First, he would attempt to show how any work of art, for instance a poem that is read, affects the senses and, secondly, he would use his method to try and relate a completed work of art to the mind that produced it. The first motive, as already suggested, is present in Addison, who had

become interested in Locke's conception of the 'idea' and wished to apply it to literature and the arts. Addison suggests that sight is the most 'perfect and most delightful of all our senses' and the pleasures of the imagination are the pleasures that come from sight; 'I here mean such as arise from visible objects, either when we have them actually in our view, or when we call up their ideas into our minds by paintings, statues, descriptions, or any the like occasion'¹. Addison ignores music altogether, nor does he think of literature as the spoken word. Later he distinguishes between the primary pleasures of the imagination 'which proceed from such objects as are before our eyes', and the pleasures of secondary imagination 'which flow from the ideas of visible objects when the objects are not actually before the eye, but are called up into our memories or formed into agreeable visions of things that are either absent or fictitious'¹. Addison, once he has stated these definitions, discusses their application to arts other than that of literature, but finally he comes to write a passage which anticipates in theme many of the later psychological discussions on literature. 'It may be here worth our while to examine', he writes, 'how it comes to pass that several readers, who are all acquainted with the same language, and know the meaning of the words they read, should nevertheless have a different relish of the same descriptions. . . . This different taste must proceed either from the perfection of imagination in one more than in another, or from different ideas that several readers affix to the same words. For, to have a true relish and form a right judgement of a description, a man should be born with a good imagination and must have well weighed the force and energy that lie in the several words of a language, so as to be able to distinguish which are most significant and expressive of their proper ideas, and what additional strength and beauty they are capable of receiving from conjunction with others. The fancy must be warm to retain the print of those images it hath received from outward objects, and the judgement discerning to know what expressions are most proper to clothe and adorn them to the best

¹ *Spectator*, No. 411.

advantage. A man who is deficient in either of these respects, though he may receive the general notion of a description, can never see distinctly all its particular beauties ; as a person with a weak sight may have the confused prospect of a place that lies before him, without entering into its several parts, or discerning the variety of its colours in their full glory and perfection.'¹ Later psychological criticism has gone farther in its attempts to analyse the precise effect made on each individual by a work of art. It has developed its own technique and vocabulary for this purpose, and the statement of its results is disconcertingly abstruse to the lay man. Mr. I. A. Richards, for instance, in his illuminating volume, *The Principles of Literary Criticism*, thus summarizes the work of Fechner and others in this field : ' the generalisations ', he writes, ' to be drawn from these simple experiments are, if we do not expect too much, encouraging. Some light upon obscure processes, such as empathy, and upon the intervention of muscular imagery and tendencies to action in the apprehension of shapes and of sequences of sounds which had been supposed to be apprehended by visual or auditory apparatus alone, some interesting facts about the plasticity of rhythm, some approach towards a classification of the different ways in which colours may be regarded, increased recognition of the complexity of even the simplest activities, these and similar results have been well worth the trouble expended. But more important has been the revelation of the great variety in the responses which even the simplest stimuli elicit. Even so ambiguous an object as a plain colour, it has been found, can arouse in different persons and in the same person at different times extremely different states of mind.'² This aspect of psychological study must be admitted to exist and to possess a method of its own from which results can be obtained. But we have the right to question how far such studies can assist in the evolution of a critical method. It will certainly help in the primary realization that the effect made by a work of art will vary with each individual, but that conclusion can be gained without such

¹ *Spectator*, No. 416.

² I. A. Richards, *The Principles of Literary Criticism*, London, 1925.

elaborate preparation. In its more detailed application this method would seem to belong more closely to psychology than to literature, and its results may be more valuable to those who examine the states and processes of the mind than to those who wish to examine their deepest contact with literary products. I do not breathe more satisfactorily once my mechanism of breathing has been detailed and examined, nor does my heart function any better once its imperfections have been clinically investigated. Such studies are valuable in themselves for their own purposes. This type of psychology may use literature as part of its data, but it yet remains to be shown that its results are valuable in a critical method.

The second psychological approach which studies the relationship of the work created to the creating mind arouses more complex considerations. Here again the psychologist may use literature for his own purposes and consider plays and poems or any artistic production merely as the *dossier* of a mental case with which he has to deal; such I take it is Freud's method with Leonardo da Vinci. The critic of literature will have a different bias. He will not call on the work to explain the mind, but rather seek to gather all that can be known about the mind to explore more fully the values found in the work. He will be distrustful of a systematized vocabulary, for his description of the work must be in sympathy with its own expression. Yet he cannot ignore the approach of this psychological method, and he may discover that its findings are useful for his own purposes.

VI

It is with a consciousness of the increasing complexity of literary studies that I have summarized some of these contemporary activities. I would emphasize again that I am not disparaging any one of them, but at times one is tempted to long for those days when an eighteenth-century gentleman could read leisurely and discursively in his library and feel that that was enough. It is only a passing wish and yet it

arises from what I would consider as disproportionate values in our modern approach to literature.

All comment and elucidation of literature follows either the method of science or that of the arts. The preparation of glossaries, of texts, bibliographical investigations, the elucidation of biographical fact, palaeographical studies, all these are pursued by a scientific method: truth is here approached by the co-ordination and arrangement of all such data as are available, studied in their minutest detail. Not unnaturally, the academic study of literature has inclined towards these scientific aspects. Superficially they appear to give a severer mental discipline and their results can be more easily assessed. Apart from this there remains the historical coincidence that the development of schools of English in the Universities synchronized with a greatly enhanced interest in research in the science departments. Literature, awed by science, emphasized the scientific aspects of its own study and gave these a dominant place in the academic regimen. Criticism as an art has been obscured and despised. A literary criticism that ignores scientific studies is in danger, but to-day the graver danger is that the study of literature as an art may be completely lost in the unremitting energy of those who practise literary-scientific research.

With a consciousness of these activities in the contemporary comment on literature, I have been led to express, however tentatively, my own approach to a method in literary criticism.

At the outset one is reminded of the difficulty which pursues literature more than any other of the arts in that its basic material, the word, is used widely for purposes which are not artistic. Words are employed for catalogues, books of information, wills, statutes, and a myriad other purposes which have no conscious artistic purpose behind them. Even when one has excluded these obvious categories there remain works varying in the degree to which they have been penetrated by artistic intention. The study of literature as an art begins with such works as have either in a part or the whole some consciousness of form, whether it has been deliberately contrived or gained by some fortunate accident. Even this limiting

definition leaves a formidable body of material which must be approached in different ways. The distinction made by De Quincey between the literature of 'knowledge' and the literature of 'power' is valuable and it is supplemented with greater clarity by Professor Oliver Elton's division of 'pure' and 'applied' literature. Pope's *Essay on Criticism* belongs to the literature of knowledge (not very accurate knowledge) in that it attempts to lay at our disposal a body of information on poetry. Its consideration as a work of art is limited to the study of the aptitude with which the heroic couplet and the vocabulary have been applied to Pope's purposes within the poem. Keats's *Lamia*, on the other hand, belongs to the literature of power. The poem has no body of fact to convey directly: the fable, its interpretation, and the words have been so organized into a unity that the whole can be judged as a work of art. The distinctions are even more varied and perplexing in works of prose. History and philosophy belong to applied literature, though, as with Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, elements in the style and presentation may give a power to an individual work beyond the mere conveyance of facts or ideas. Biography sometimes approaches art only in an inverse relationship to its honesty of intention.

In what follows I have chosen as examples works which are mainly works of the imagination, pure literature in its completest form, but I would not ignore the fact that literature has a close relationship to history on the one side and to philosophy on the other. There lies in literature a rich material for social history, as can be seen in works from *Piers Plowman* to *Past and Present*, while in Dryden and the satirists the contact of literature with the minutiae of party politics is frequently more closely expressed. This, as are many of the other studies already examined, is a separate theme with delimiting factors of its own devising. *Absalom and Achitophel*, for instance, is a contemporary historical document, and from it the historian may be able to illustrate some of the sentiments felt on the relationships of the king and Shaftesbury and Monmouth. For the literary critic the values are changed: he is interested in the degree to which

ephemerality in the theme has infected the poem with an impurity of form. Philosophy's relationship to literature is a more intimate one. Plato banished the poets from his Republic, but he found the ways of poetry, the warmth of imagery and fable, the most appropriate method of conveying his philosophical thought. The contribution of English poets to the ultimate problems of philosophy, of the nature of reality and of the degree of free-will, has not been contemptible. Once the approach to these problems is personal or intuitive, or infused with an element of passion, the discipline of some literary form is welcomed. Much literature is free from philosophy,—some lyric, some fiction, and much drama—but of all studies, philosophy remains the sober discipline most intimately related to the art of literature.

The art of criticism, as I see it, begins with an act of interest, either of attraction or of passionate repulsion in relationship to a work of art. Once that sense of being moved has been aroused critical processes can follow. Coleridge in defining poetry writes 'that not the poem which we have read, but that to which we return, with the greatest pleasure, possesses the genuine power, and claims the name of essential poetry'.¹ The definition might be extended to include other forms of literature. The emotion may not always be pleasure in its simpler forms but some 'strange necessity'² that calls us back to the work that has attracted us. Without such attraction there can be no criticism of a definitely literary character. This primary consideration, that we must have this attraction in relationship to a work of art before we can develop critical attitudes towards it, may seem self-evident. Yet if it be allowed, certain critical positions are seriously challenged. For instance, Professor Saintsbury, at the close of his *History of Criticism*, sets out the principles to be followed in criticism in the following terms: 'But it may fairly be asked, How do you propose to define *any* principles for your New Critic? And the answers are ready, one in Hellenic, one in Hebraic phraseology. The definition shall be couched as the man of

¹ S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, London, 1847.

² Miss Rebecca West's term.

understanding would define it: and if any will do the works of the New Criticism he shall know the doctrine thereof. And the works themselves are not hard to set forth. He must read, and, as far as possible, read everything—that is the first and great commandment. If he omits one period of a literature, even one author of some real, if ever so little, importance in a period, he runs the risk of putting his view of the rest out of focus; if he fails to take at least some account of other literatures as well, his state will be nearly as perilous. Secondly, he must constantly compare books, authors, literatures indeed, to see in what each differs from each, but never in order to dislike one because it is not like the other. Thirdly, he must as far as he possibly can, divest himself of any idea of what a book *ought to be* until he has seen what it is.¹ Such a method destroys all conception of the close continued approach to the single work which has affected us, or the detailed study of that work for itself, to discover the fullness of its possibilities of appeal. I do not suggest that the work of art which has affected us can be studied in some splendid isolation. If I approach *Paradise Lost* I may be led finally to most of what is best known in the literature of several countries. But I come to that pursuit by the closely defined motive that *Paradise Lost* has in some way moved me. The pursuit of my analysis will take so much time that I shall neglect much that is unrelated to my study both in the literature that precedes and follows. The aim that Professor Saintsbury sets out should govern the study of the history of literature, not its criticism. The material which he commands us to assimilate is so vast that we shall be led merely to docket authors and assign them to periods and movements so that we may know where to find them. But in so doing we have exercised a subtle treachery upon the individual works. The contention implied in his assertion can be tested in the terms of other arts. Am I, in order to become a critic of painting, to see all the pictures not only of my own country but in all the countries of

¹ G. Saintsbury, *History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe*, Edinburgh, 1900-4.

Western Europe, even the pictures of 'ever so little importance in a period'? Or am I first to be deeply affected by one picture and in my analysis of that to trace back my study liberally to all that can be associated with it?

A further natural corollary will be that the bias in literary study will return to the great work, or the work that has given the deepest and most frequent satisfaction to impressionable minds. The historical methods have given an undue prominence to minor work, even to Dunciad poets, whose lives and letters are to be prepared and whose works are edited with textual scrupulosity mainly because they have never been studied before. It is true that as part of the study of the great work, *Paradise Lost*, *Don Juan*, or *The Prelude*, or even of a lyric, minor work may be called in for its place in commentary. But it will sink to its true significance. Nor need any work be considered minor and unworthy of close independent examination if it is capable of evolving that attraction which is the prefatory act of criticism. It may be emphasized here again that for other studies, for the history of literary taste, for the history of the stage, or of the book-trade, a more all-embracing attitude may be essential. Such studies have independent methods: they are important ancillaries of literary criticism.

Once the single work has been discovered it remains to outline the general method in which its criticism can be developed. The problem varies, naturally with the type of work and with the date of composition. The poem, or play, or novel may at first reading have been encountered casually in any edition. The first obligation is to discover all the accurate information that is available on the text. With modern works this can be achieved with comparative ease. The first¹ authorized printed text will be the primary authority, though it will frequently be necessary to compare this with each version reprinted in the author's life-time. For instance,

¹ I admit that with some works the last version must be made the basis, as with Goethe's *Faust*. The final choice of a version must be an act of judgement on the part of the critic for each work of art which he examines.

I may meet *The Ancient Mariner* for the first time in an anthology. I shall first go back to the version printed in the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798, and then to each subsequent edition published in Coleridge's lifetime. The impression made by the 1798 edition will be different from that of the anthology reprint. Even the title will be spelt differently—*The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*—and many of the lines will be changed. In 1798 'the Mariners' offer the albatross 'biscuit worms', a thing which they do not do after that year. This first version and subsequent versions help in the construction of the biography of the poem. It may be that apart from versions published by the writer himself there exists some further manuscript version whose date and manner of composition can be established with some precision. Such, for instance, is the early version of *The Prelude* published by Professor de Sélincourt in 1926. It varies widely from the authorized edition issued in 1850, the year of Wordsworth's death, and its readings are of assistance in reconstructing the genesis of the poem. The material will vary with each work, but it must necessarily be incomplete. Each line in print must have once existed in a mind, and unspecified modifications may have suggested themselves between the first entry into the mind and the ultimate appearance in the printed text. The closest approach exists where the manuscript with the recorded revisions of the creating mind can still be studied, as, for instance, with the manuscript of *Lycidas*. Yet, while all this textual material is to be used, one version must be accepted as a basis, for a work of art is a living reality, and conclusions gained from the rest of the material must be subordinated to the study of that one selected version.

Such a method can only be applied to modern texts whose manner of publication is known and whose authenticity cannot seriously be questioned. The problem is more difficult for earlier works, particularly for medieval manuscripts and for the texts of Elizabethan plays. Here the conditions under which the work was originally issued are frequently matters of theory: the establishment of a text and of authorship are governed by technical considerations, and are not

ached to elements of speculation. The danger is that lation about the nature of the text may become such occupation that the study of the text as a work of art ver reached. I have indicated my own belief in this & already in this study. It is that the critic of literature accept such information on the nature of the text and orship as is scientifically valid. But where scientific mation ceases and speculative hypotheses begin he should h himself from controversy and begin to study the work work of art from the basis of that nucleus of precise mation available when his study is made. Where the nee is not irrefutable no critical deduction on the origin e text or an authorship should be allowed. For instance, is an excellent Elizabethan play entitled *The Lament- and True Tragedy of M. Arden of Feversham in Kent*. play was once thought to have been written by Shake- e and it has since been doled round to a number of his mporaries, but the study of the play as a play has been cted because of this uncertainty in authorship. But play as a play, its virtues of language and form, can udied even if the primary information about it is in- lette.

have reached the stage when with any given work of have undergone some preliminary act of interest, and ve followed it with the establishment of such textual mation as is available. What is to follow ? My next ntion is that there is no given method by which a work erature can be studied. The method of criticism must with each new work. The delusion of aesthetic criticism & belief in a general aesthetic. The only aesthetic is an idual aesthetic reworked for each new work of art that cts the critic. The function of that individual aesthetic be to attempt to establish the 'biography' of the work. is a tripartite process, an attempt first to establish an ession, and it is only an impression, of how the work & existed in the mind of the author; secondly, what eant to the audience of the time; and thirdly, what the ry of the work is outside the age in which it was created.

This process of analysis must be concluded with a final synthetic act of criticism, in which one revalues the impression made by the work in view of these investigations. Much of the material used will have a reality of fact, but the final resulting act of criticism will be an act of imagination which, while it will be intimately associated with the creative work, will have an existence of its own as a piece of experience. Many will suggest that the method I outline will lead criticism back to the 'aesthetic delusions' of Coleridge. Coleridge's deficiencies, and they are most apparent in his work on Elizabethan drama, arose from the fact that he worked from inadequate data of a scientific type about the plays. I have already admitted that literary criticism must be recommenced with each new addition of factual data, but as it must also be recommenced in each new generation and with each new critic, nothing has been wasted. Coleridge, when he was working from more adequate data, as, for instance, in his criticism of Wordsworth's poetry, is less open to attack.

I would examine briefly the limitations of the tripartite division which I have suggested. First, it must be allowed that no one knows how a creative work arises in the mind of a writer, nor how he comes to set it down. In some rare instances one can approach closely towards an understanding, as Professor Lowes has shown in *The Road to Xanadu*. But a work of art is an experience, and an experience can never be repeated under the same conditions. Yet an impression of that creating process will be gained, and that is all that can be expected. In verse or prose it will begin with a study of words, the isolation of the contemporary and personal associations of vocabulary: it is here that philology and literary criticism are truly wedded. Beyond the individual word it will extend to the phrase, particularly to imagery. The study of contemporaries will establish to what extent this is derived, but the freshly conceived images will be truly an insight into the way that the creating mind saw the world and its ideas. Beyond the phrase will lie the sentence, the attachment of the mind to the work of others, and the way in which its independence arises. The impressions of bio-

graphers of the personality of the creating mind will be of little value, but biographical fact will be exhaustively used. From biography we would learn of the books the writer read, of the friends he had, and personal influences to which he was open, and of the conditions, economic, social or personal, under which he wrote: *Queen Mab* must be pursued into the *Political Justice*; the religious elements of *Table Talk* to the watching, evangelical eye of John Newton; and *Samson Agonistes* to the political situation in England after the Restoration. The material for such a study is frequently incomplete. In such instances the critic, it seems to me, has the right to complete the picture by his own intuitions gained in contact with the work, and the preceding work of the writer, and disciplined, of course, by his knowledge of the time.

On leaving this pursuit of the creating process one can turn to the impression made by the work on the contemporary audience. I mean here not the comparatively simple study of how they received it and why they liked or disliked it; that belongs to the history of taste. The problem of the critic is rather to discover what values the words and images had at the time when the author used them. This study is intimately associated with the examination of the creating mind itself. It will attempt to establish the relationship of his vocabulary to the known associations of words in his time, for the great literature often impregnates words with values which they did not previously possess. Further, one would discover the relationship of the author to what may be called the literary conditions affecting his work, or more precisely his own relationship and recognition of a contemporary audience, and of its requirements. This problem is seen most fully in the drama, where the writer is dependent upon a contemporary mechanism, upon transmission through actors, and possibly upon prevailing fashions and requirements in an audience. The aim of this second section of the study is to reveal to what extent the author's values and developing powers have been cramped or stimulated by these conditions. Modern studies, particularly in relationship to the Elizabethan stage,

have served to establish a number of ways in which drama was modified by contemporary conditions, but it is not enough to explain a work of art in relationship to the conditions in which it arose. Such an examination must be but one factor in the disciplined consideration of what the work of art means in its fullness to the critic in the moment in which he is interpreting it. The danger of certain types of modern criticism is to make the elucidation of the impression made by a work of art on the contemporary audience as an end in itself. It is the delusion which confuses historical and literary studies. It is well to pursue the Elizabethan conception of *Hamlet* as far as clarity will permit, but to assert that the discovery of the Elizabethan conception of *Hamlet* is the end of criticism is to assert that criticism is pursuing something which cannot be attained. *Hamlet* as a play is a collection of spoken words and we can never hear those words pronounced as an Elizabethan pronounced them: the effect of the play would be quite different if we could do so. The gap that separates us from the reality of those Elizabethan sounds is no greater than the gap that separates us from the contemporary theatre, its conditions, and the impression of the spoken words on the minds of the auditors. The end of criticism, as I see it, is to use as much as is clearly known of such problems, conscious still that but little is known, as a factor in a larger synthesis; and this leads to the third movement in the act of criticism.

The biography of a work of art rests not merely in its own age or with its creator: it has, like all living things, a continuous history. *Hamlet* is not merely Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: it is Saxo-Grammaticus's, and Belleforêt's, and Goethe's, and Coleridge's, and finally yours or mine. It will have drawn into its biography much that can be neglected, but also rich and modifying accretions of thought and contemplation which have served to enrich its vitality. Even lyric poetry has this larger history; elements not necessarily in the mind of the writer enrich the impression that it can make. Swinburne's *Itylus* can be interpreted more fully if the memory of Philomela's legend in all that it was known to

mean before he approached it can be gathered into the critical concept. Even more securely the patterns of lyrical verse carry memories sometimes over seven centuries of poetry, as does the six-line stanza in Burns.

So one comes to that final art of criticism in which all that has been gathered from the tripartite study is used to modify one's first attraction to the work of art. A tutored and disciplined impressionism will thus arise and will extend into an exploration of all that the poem has seemed to mean from its first assembling through its living contact with the minds of men. Such a criticism is allied to philology imaginatively conceived, to the study of form and pattern, to philosophy: it recognizes the place of history, of bibliography, and of biography. Yet it realizes that it possesses a method of its own which is not historical or philological, which has neither bibliography nor even accuracy, as accuracy is conceived in the sciences, as its end. Ultimately it is the contact of a mind with a living thing modified by all that the inquiring mind has come to conceive of a living thing. The final act of criticism is a piece of experience with elements that are factual and elements that cannot be established as facts. Its discipline is no less stern than in the sciences, but it does not proceed beyond a certain point in their way.

In setting out the limits and possibilities of criticism as I see them I may seem to have grown inconsistent with that desire for a simple, sociable contact with literature which I suggested at the beginning. But against any charge of inconsistency I would urge that I have suggested as the first movement in any criticism an act of attraction towards a work of art. This is where criticism begins, and it is that contact which the circumstances of modern transmission deny so many of us. Our active contact with literature is too small: our critical contact too great. We need a theatre in which our plays from the earliest Miracles could be performed, sometimes with an approach towards an illusion of presenting them as they were originally performed, sometimes decked out in all the resources of modern theatrical art. Much of our Shakespearian criticism would disappear if the vision of

his acted plays were steadily before our minds. I know that it will be advanced that we can appreciate *Hamlet* or *Othello* from a single visit to the theatre. But who expected to appreciate an opera of any solid artistic value at a single hearing? The score must be studied and the opera continually re-heard. Similarly with tragedy, the text must be studied, critical disciplines initiated, and the play constantly re-seen. The same is even more true of poetry. Poetry is meant to be spoken or chanted with some musical accompaniment, as the Duke told Viola of the song in *Twelfth Night*:

. . . it is old and plain ;
The spinsters and the knitters in the sun
And the free maids, that weave their threads with bones,
Do use to chaunt it.

But where in England for this many a year could you find poetry so rendered, naturally and without self-consciousness as a natural social occupation? We have become silent and hermits in our pursuit of an art whose greatest triumphs lie in the spoken word. Yet if these things be denied us my plea remains that we should preserve the criticism of the art of literature as an activity possessing its own methods, limited by its own purposes, striving to find that individuality which gives to each work its own life and continued existence.

B. IFOR EVANS.

SHAKESPEARE AND THE PLEBS

FROM time to time attempts have been made to deduce from Shakespeare's works the political views of their author, but few of them have succeeded in being convincing ; and this for a very good reason. The plays of Shakespeare, like those of most great dramatists, are impersonal. So wide is the scene of life which they embrace that with a little diligent search support can be found in them for every view of life and for every creed, with the result that any one who attempts to lift passages from the dramas and to say to the world, ' Here is Shakespeare's view on this or that question ', immediately finds himself confronted with a number of other passages which prove quite as certainly that this was *not* his view. We are all agreed that, generally speaking, it is vastly unfair to identify a writer with any one of his created characters ; it is equally unfair to attempt to foist on to him the opinions which they voice. In treating of Shakespeare and the plebs, therefore, we must beware of accepting what others say about the lower orders as considered pronouncements from the lips of the dramatist himself. It was Shakespeare's task to present life as he saw it, or to dramatize a story, and in either case the expression of his own opinions through the mouths of his characters was made wellnigh impossible for him. He was under the necessity of reproducing the views which he found were held by others, irrespective of whether they were his own or not. How, then, are we to set about our task of ascertaining Shakespeare's view of the plebs ? The only things about a play which can be safely regarded as the author's own are the conception of the plot, the grouping and arrangement of the characters, and the function accorded to each individual or to each group, though any elaboration of the material given in the sources, or the introduction of new matter which does not appear in the source of the play at all, but which the dramatist presumably had a definite purpose in introducing, may also prove of

significance in this connexion. We must therefore approach our question by way of studying the use which Shakespeare makes of the plebs in his plays. We may then arrive at some conception of his attitude towards the common folk.

Chaucer's monk defined tragedy as

a certeyn storie,
As olde bokes maken us memorie,
Of him that stode in greet prosperitee,
And is y-fallen out of heigh degree,
Into miserie, and endeth wrecchedly.

For Shakespeare this definition in the main held good. Tragedy demanded royal or noble rank. This, indeed, was by no means peculiar to Shakespeare; it was the view of the majority of contemporary dramatists.¹ Marlowe, in *The Jew of Malta* and *Faustus*, it is true, wrote very powerful plays around a mere usurer and a scholar, and Heywood, with his domestic tragedies, moved into middle-class life, as did also the anonymous author of *Arden of Fferersham*, but it was generally accepted that only the misfortunes of noble characters were fitted to move the deeper feelings of an audience. Under these circumstances it is remarkable, not that the lower orders play so small a part in Shakespearian tragedy, but that they appear at all. French classical drama excluded them almost entirely, and not a few Elizabethan tragedies are to be found in which they are quite unrepresented. Shakespeare, then, did not include them from precedent or custom; he must have had some definite purpose in introducing them. Of course, it may be suggested, as it frequently has been, that he only puts them there in order to ridicule them, and to afford comic relief to the more tragic main theme; but this assertion, with which I shall deal later, is somewhat sweeping and uncritical, and views only one side of the facts.

It is apparent throughout the plays that Shakespeare regards the nobility and the lower orders as two distinct

¹ Who inherited the conception, of course, from the ancient classical tragedy.

species of humanity, hardly of the same flesh and blood with each other. Nobility, like murder, will out. The two sons of Cymbeline, though ignorant of their parentage, though bred as peasants in the wilds, where all courtly training has been denied them, are endowed with a mind far above their present station. Says Belarius, their guardian and foster-father,

though train'd up thus meanly
I' the cave wherein they bow, their thoughts do hit
The roofs of palaces ; and nature prompts 'em
In simple and lowly things, to prince it, much
Beyond the trick of others.

We may concede that *Cymbeline* is a late play, and does not show up Shakespeare's art to the best advantage, but in this particular respect it is not exceptional. The same attitude can be seen in other pieces. Coriolanus enters the city of Antium in close disguise, his identity known to no one, yet all recognize him immediately as a man of noble birth, and no mere commoner. Aufidius himself admits to him that

thy face
Bears a command in 't ; though thy tackle's torn
Thou show'st a noble vessel,

while the two loquacious serving-men, though at first disposed to turn him away, feel instinctively that he is some one of infinitely higher standing than themselves.

Second Serv. Nay, I knew by his face that there was something in him : He had, sir, a kind of face, methought,—I cannot tell how to term it.

First Serv. He had so ; looking as it were—would I were hanged, but I thought there was more in him than I could think.

Second Serv. So did I, I'll be sworn : he is simply the rarest man i' the world.

Now this conception of nobility was by no means new. It had been accepted for generations, it was still widely held in Elizabeth's day, and not many years afterwards was to find an echo in the doctrine of the divine right of kings. Not even with the Civil War did it die out completely. In thus

recognizing a distinction between nobility and plebs, Shakespeare did not necessarily reveal himself as a champion of divine right and an anti-plebeian. The day of democracy, with its cry of 'a man's a man for a' that' had not yet dawned, and we cannot with justice charge a writer with rejecting a doctrine which in his day had never been seriously accepted.

There is no denying that Shakespeare does sometimes (not always, as one writer would have us believe) employ low characters merely to raise a laugh. In tragedy they are not infrequently used to supply a light relief to the tenser scenes, and in comedy to provide a variation from the more exalted characters, whose humour is rather of the witty type; it is therefore apt to pall if it is unbroken. The two serving-men of *Coriolanus* referred to above seem to fulfil no function other than this; the two Gobbos of *The Merchant of Venice* are of much the same type—but in both of these cases the characters in question appear in the play only once or twice. It is a noteworthy fact that when low figures are introduced with the sole purpose of creating amusement, they are upon the stage for a few moments only by way of interlude, and then are never seen again. What conclusion can we draw from this? Shakespeare evidently saw that among the lower classes there were certain types who were nothing short of buffoons, but he was unwilling to bring them too much into prominence, and hold them up as an example of the average working-man of his day. Besides this, he was far too skilful and critical a craftsman to introduce much material which had no practical value or no real bearing upon the development of the plot. Where lower characters make a frequent appearance they have a much more serious function to perform than simply to arouse thoughtless laughter by farcical behaviour.¹ Dogberry and Verges, who play so conspicuous a role in *Much Ado*, are as far removed from the two Gobbos as is Macbeth from Marlowe's Barabas; and even Bully Bottom and his Athenian workmen of *A Midsummer-Night's*

¹ And sometimes when they only enter once, e.g. the gravediggers in *Hamlet* and the porter in *Macbeth*.

Dream, clownish as they are, serve to bind together the courtly and the fairy worlds.

It may be well to emphasize at this point the fact that Shakespeare's *dramatis personae* were conditioned by elements not wholly within his control. The majority of his plays, with the exception of one or two which were obviously intended for court performance, were written for a definite company of actors, and it is not inconceivable, therefore, that the parts were framed with an eye to the available acting talent. It will be noted that the low comedy characters are almost invariably found in pairs. As early as *Love's Labour's Lost* they make their appearance in Dull and Costard, they are repeated in Launce and Speed of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and reappear subsequently as the two Dromios of *The Comedy of Errors*, Dogberry and Verges of *Much Ado*, the two Gobbos of *The Merchant of Venice*, and the gravediggers in *Hamlet*. The most obvious explanation of his continual, almost habitual introduction of an inseparable pair of clowns is that Shakespeare had in his company two actors who were specially fitted to play clownish parts, and would have been failures at anything more serious; he was therefore under the necessity of creating parts for them. Now from the stage directions and the speech headings in the first quarto of *Much Ado* we know that Will Kemp, the Charlie Chaplin of the Elizabethan age, and Richard Cowley took the parts of Dogberry and Verges, and it is highly probable that the two low comedy parts in the other plays were played by the same actors, while the disappearance of one of the clowns in the plays later in date than *Hamlet* is to be explained by the fact that in the year 1604 Kemp quarrelled with the Lord Chamberlain's men, and left the company to join a rival troop. The appearance of these two clownish figures in the early plays, then, is clearly due, in part at least, to the construction of Shakespeare's acting company. But for the use of those pairs of characters who are *merely* clownish, and nothing else, there is another reason. Shakespeare was the child of the Renaissance. His early plays especially were modelled on the comedies of Plautus, and even in his later works the influence

of the Latin dramatist is not completely absent.¹ Now a Plautine comedy invariably included two slaves or serving-men, who had but little real purpose other than the provocation of laughter by their foolish behaviour. These Shakespeare copied along with the other stock type-characters of Latin comedy; these buffoons, then, do not necessarily represent the dramatist's conception of the lower orders. They are merely conventional, and in all probability were meant to be nothing else.

It has been alleged that whenever Shakespeare puts the lower orders upon the stage he represents them either as scamps or fools. Such a pronouncement can only come either from a prejudiced mind, which chooses deliberately to overlook one-half of the facts, or from a person imperfectly acquainted with his subject. Shakespeare was probably speaking from personal knowledge when he made Gower say of Pistol: 'Why, 'tis a gull, a fool, a rogue, that now and then goes to the wars to grace himself at his return into London under the form of a soldier. And such fellows are perfect in great commanders' names, and they will learn you by rote where services were done, at such and such a sconce, such and such a breach, at such a convoy... and this they con perfectly in the phrase of war, which they trick up with new tun'd oaths. And what a beard of the general's cut, and a horrid suit of the camp will do among foaming bottles and ale-washed wits, is wonderful to be thought on.' In his actor days, no doubt, Shakespeare had often met these people and had had his laugh at their boasting; but he knew others besides Pistol and his kind.

No one will deny that some of Shakespeare's plebeian figures are characterized mainly by folly, and that others are rogues: it is so in real life; but against these must be set the numerous loyal and faithful servants who appear in the plays. The groom in *Richard II* remains loyal to his master even when he is cast into prison, Lear's faithful fool willingly

¹ A full discussion of Shakespeare's indebtedness to Plautus is given in an article 'The Plautine Tradition in Shakespeare', by C. C. Coulter in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 1920.

endures the severest hardships with the king, Touchstone cheerfully leaves the court and accompanies his mistress into exile, while Pisanio of *Cymbeline* proves a real friend to his master Posthumus, who is so sure of his loyalty and affection that he entrusts to him his most urgent missions. Perhaps the best example of all this type is old Adam of *As You Like It*, a thorough gentleman, though only a menial. Orlando, it is true, regards him as a relic of the 'good old days',

not for the fashion of these times,
Where none will sweat but for promotion,
And having that, do choke their service up
Even with the having,

but under the circumstances one can forgive Orlando such an utterance, which, made in a moment of disappointment and passion, could hardly be expected to represent the unvarnished truth. A brother who has been deprived of his rights and virtually turned out of his paternal inheritance has ample cause to deery 'the fashion of these times'. Nor is it the degeneracy of servants alone which he deplores; it is the whole age which is wrong, the higher as well as the lower orders. Old Sir Roland de Boys, a generous and kindly master, commanded the loyalty and respect of an Adam; with self-seeking masters such as Oliver and the usurping Duke, menials are also self-seeking. Like master, like man! The truth of this is constantly stressed by Shakespeare. The plebs invariably takes its colouring from the patricians. If its representatives are mere demagogues, clamouring for revolution and for revenge on the higher classes, it is not because they alone have lost their heads, but because the whole of society is rotten at the heart. Shakespeare shows the folly of the people, but he also exposes the vices of the court; in many of his noble characters he shows true nobility, but so does he in some of the figures of lower station. On the other hand, if many of the plebs are foolish, so are some of the representatives of the nobility and royalty. Cloten, the boorish son of the queen in *Cymbeline*, is an example of Shakespeare's mockery of the born gentleman who is also a born fool, totally

lacking in all the finer qualities of the noble character. The mind that conceived a King Harry and a Richard III, an Adam and an Elbow, saw life too clearly and too completely to believe that virtue was the sole possession of any one class.

Basing our judgement on a general, all-round view, and not on individual cases, we must admit that the plebeians are not treated harshly or ungenially. Shakespeare, it is true, does not show any very heroic qualities in them in the mass, but, as Professor MacCallum¹ has remarked, he does recognize that their heart is sound and their intentions sincere. The mob of *Coriolanus* has a real grievance against the patricians, and its orators do actually speak, wisely or unwisely, 'in hunger for bread, not in thirst for revenge'. Moreover, they are fair-minded, and are willing to give Coriolanus his due in a way in which Plutarch's rebels never are. Whatever was the truth about the original dissension, Shakespeare has deliberately whitened the character of the citizens which he found in Plutarch, converting them from mere rebels against authority to agitators with a reasonable grievance, willing to concede that even their great scourge and enemy has in him some redeeming traits. The followers of Jack Cade are no mere rabble, out for loot and plunder: there is much truth in what they say.

Geo. I tell thee, Jack Cade the clothier means to dress the commonwealth, and turn it, and set a new nap upon it.

John. So he had need, for 'tis threadbare. Well, I say it was never merry world in England since gentlemen came up.

Geo. O miserable age! Virtue is not regarded in handi-crafts-men

John. The nobility think scorn to go in leather aprons.

Geo. Nay, more, the king's council are no good workmen.²

If, however, he recognizes the sound-heartedness of the people, Shakespeare also realizes that there is such a thing as crowd psychology. The reasonable view of the facts which

¹ M. W. MacCallum, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays*, 1925.

² *2 Henry VI*, iv. ii.

one individual will display is distorted in a crowd by passion and interest, which are used by demagogues as means of swaying the mob-mind. Now it is very easy here to misinterpret Shakespeare, and I fear that he frequently has suffered misinterpretation where his treatment of mob-psychology is concerned. He may condemn the mob as foolish, but it does not necessarily follow that he condemns the individuals who compose it. After half a century's work on the mob-mind psychologists are agreed that a crowd is an entirely different problem from an individual, that the individual in a crowd gains a feeling of excessive strength which leads him on to extremes, and that the mentality of a crowd is lower than that of the least intellectual person in it. Even the most able and level-headed people, when once they have gained a mob-sense, will do or say things which individually each one knows to be foolish. If we read Shakespeare aright it would seem that he had realized this two centuries before our psychologists started to consider the question. The Roman mob, in a moment of anger and impetuosity, banishes Coriolanus—perhaps a foolish act, but a typical 'mob' act. At a later stage in the play we again meet some of the very citizens who clamoured for his exile, but they are no longer the old mob. They are now their individual selves, anxious about the threatened invasion of the city by their late oppressor ; and now listen to their conversation :

First Citizen. For mine own part,
When I said, banish him, I said, 'twas pity.

Second Cit. And so did I.

Third Cit. And so did I ; and, to say the truth, so did very many of us: that we did, we did for the best ; and though we willingly consented to his banishment, yet it was against our will.

Cominius. Ye're goodly things, you voices !

Menenius. You have made

Good work, you and your cry ! Shall's to the Capitol ?

Com. O ay, what else ?

[*Exeunt COMINIUS and MENENIUS.*]

Sicinius. Go, masters, get you home ; be not dismay'd :
These are a side that would be glad to have

This true which they so seem to fear. Go home,
And show no sign of fear.

First Cit. The gods be good to us! Come, masters, let's home. I ever said we were i' the wrong when we banished him.

Sec. Cit. So did we all. But come, let's home.

[*Exeunt CITIZENS.*]

Exactly the same change of attitude occurs in *Julius Caesar*. The very citizens who were so loud in their approbation of the conspirators and their action, under the influence of Anthony's oratory are the first to sneer at the suggestion that 'Brutus is an honourable man', and the same person who warns the general that he were 'best to speak no harm of Brutus here', becomes the most vehement in condemnation of the murder, for he can now see the possible consequences.

Here is the contrast. Here is the very characteristic of which we hear so much from our psychologists. And to what does it point? How does it help us forward in our present subject? It points decidedly to one fact: *Shakespeare condemned the mob, but he did not necessarily condemn the individuals of whom it was composed.* So acute was his observation, and so wide his knowledge of life, that, without the help of any scientific research, he recognized what M. Gustav Le Bon has told us are the two essential characteristics of the mob-mind. 'In a crowd it is stupidity, not mother wit that is accumulated.'¹ 'The crowd is always intellectually inferior to the isolated individual.'²

When the plebeians assemble in crowds they are apt to become as wax in the hands of their leaders. Unfortunately leaders are not always the best counsellors, and these demagogues, mere agitators who talk 'hot air', Shakespeare condemns scathingly. The mob of *Henry VI* is sincere enough, and is presented quite sympathetically, but Cade himself is nothing but a burlesque of the tub-thumping revolutionist, who seeks to make capital and personal profit out of the just grievances of the people. He addresses his followers in the terms,

¹ Gustav Le Bon, *The Crowd, a Study of the Popular Mind*, 1903, p. 32.

² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Be brave, then ; for your captain is brave, and vows reformation. There shall be in England seven halfpenny loaves sold for a penny : the three-hooped pot shall have ten hoops ; and I will make it felony to drink small beer : all the realm shall be in common ; and in Cheapside shall my palfry go to grass : and when I am king, as king I will be,—

All. God save your majesty !

Cade. I thank you, good people : there shall be no money ; all shall eat and drink on my score ; and I will apparel them all in one livery, that they may agree like brothers and worship me their lord.

All this has the true stamp of the fiery agitator, with his cry of 'down with everybody, and up with me'. Still, Shakespeare would not have us believe that all the leaders of the people are of this type. Every democratic movement has its two wings, the extremists and the moderates, and these two aspects Shakespeare displays side by side in *Coriolanus*, where he contrasts the good leader with the bad. The commonalty, justly incensed against the patricians for withholding from them their rightful share of corn, have assembled in the market-place to voice their grievances. Two citizens are presented to us as spokesmen, representative of the two factions. The first citizen is obviously for taking extreme measures ; he would kill Marcius straightway, without any more ado, and set fire to the houses of the patricians above the heads of their owners. Though he is willing to admit that Menenius is not unfriendly to the plebs, he stoutly refuses to listen to any reason from him. The second citizen, on the other hand, is more moderate. Less headstrong and hasty, he is inclined to take a more reasonable view of the situation, and find some good even in the bad. He deprecates his fellow's malicious speaking, and constantly attempts to sway the crowd away from violence. In the face of these facts, is it possible to maintain that Shakespeare can see no redeeming qualities in the common folk ? *Coriolanus*, it is true, has nothing but abuse to pour upon them, but then *Coriolanus*, who 'wishes to be every man himself', could never find anything but abuse for those who were below him,

or who stood in his way. Menenius, a much more level-headed patrician, unbiased and unprejudiced, the one representative of common sense in the play, is by no means unfriendly to them. It is interesting, and for our present purpose profitable, to contrast his greeting to the crowd with that of Marcius. The latter feels it a condescension even to address them as

dissentious rogues,
That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion,
Make yourselves scabs,

and immediately provokes them to anger. But Menenius is more affable.

Why, masters, my good friends, mine honest neighbours, he exclaims,

Will you undo yourselves?

The plebeians, who are after all good enough fellows at heart, are quite amenable to this gentler form of treatment. They listen attentively to his story of the belly and allow themselves to be virtually persuaded of the folly of their course of action, when their resentment is aroused by the contempt shown them by Coriolanus as soon as he appears on the scene. Menenius, jovial patrician as he is, has a keen insight into a situation, and appreciates this fact. He chides Marcius for his tactlessness, and ends with a

Nay, these are almost thoroughly persuaded.

If we were rash enough to venture to find any one character in the play who could be identified with Shakespeare himself we should be inclined to pick upon Menenius, the level-headed, impartial critic of both sides. He stands, so to speak, as a mediator between the two factions, seeing the vices and virtues of each, and attempting to restrain the foolish extremities of both. While he does not disguise the fact that the masses are far from wise and capable counsellors, he is ready to recognize their virtues.

Shakespeare's so-called revolutionaries are not revolutionary in the modern sense of the term. Rarely do we meet with a leveller, who wishes to abrogate all social distinctions and proclaim a state of liberty, equality, fraternity. Whether

the mob is an English or a Roman one any conception of anarchism is alike far from the minds of both. They may clamour for the expulsion of one ruler, but only in order to replace him by another of their own choosing. Cade's followers are quite ready to hail their leader as king; the Roman populace, not content that Caesar should rule as consul, offer him a crown, and even the two tribunes of *Coriolanus* are in their own way petty kings over the plebeians. Authority emanating from above, not from below, was still the ideal with them. Now here again Shakespeare has anticipated the psychologists. The crowd, says M. Le Bon, always desires some ruling force. It seeks not for freedom but for servitude; it is ready to act, but not to think for itself. It is, moreover, essentially conservative at heart, manifesting a deep-laid, sentimental regard for traditions and institutions of long standing, and it is in this conservative presentation of the crowd that Shakespeare has shown his wonderful understanding of the mob-mind.

It is worthy of note that the better characters of Shakespeare rarely ridicule the lower classes; only those who are themselves vicious to a greater or lesser degree abuse them. The example of Menenius has just been quoted. From the same play another instance can be taken. The Roman soldiers under the command of Marcius make a gallant attempt on the gates of Corioli, but are repulsed. Marcius, thinking only of personal glory, and unable to accept defeat even after a stout resistance, turns upon them with

All the contagion of the south light on you,
 You shames of Rome! you herd of—Boils and plagues
 Plaster you o'er, that you may be abhorr'd
 Further than seen and one infect another
 Against the wind a mile! You souls of geese,
 That bear the shapes of men, how have you run
 From slaves that apes would beat! Pluto and hell!
 All hurt behind; backs red, and faces pale
 With flight and argued fear! Mend and charge home,
 Or, by the fires of heaven, I'll leave the foe
 And make my wars on you.¹

¹ *Coriolanus*, I. iv.

Meanwhile, the troops of Cominius have also suffered defeat. Cominius, however, is of a totally different calibre from Marcius, and is ready to congratulate his men upon their efforts.

Breathe you, my friends : well fought ; we are come off
Like Romans, neither foolish in our stands,
Nor cowardly in retire : believe me, sirs,
We shall be charg'd again.

A comparison of the two episodes hardly shows up Marcius to advantage. A similar contrast occurs in *As You Like It*. Adam has been a faithful and loyal servant. All that he gets from the villainous Oliver is 'Old dog'; Orlando, on the other hand, treats him as a friend and an equal, takes him as a trusty companion on his journey, and when he is weary looks after him as he would his own father. It is almost invariably the case that only the evil characters refuse to see any good in the common people.

Extensive reference has been made to *Coriolanus*. The other Roman play of Shakespeare in which the mob plays a conspicuous part is *Julius Caesar*. Now, as Professor Moulton has pointed out,¹ these two plays represent two definite stages in a social evolution, the evolution from the concept of the State to that of the individual. Amongst the fundamental ideas in the philosophy of Shakespeare is the contrast between the inner and the outer life. Applied to an individual this theory produces characters such as Lear, who, though outwardly majestic and impressive enough, is suffering from the effects of mental senility, or Lady Macbeth, essentially womanish at heart though externally masculine. When applied to society as a whole it is not so simple ; it becomes the antithesis of life centring around the State, and that centring around the individual. As civilization advances the stress is gradually shifted from the former to the latter, even as in drama the centre of interest shifts from the outward to the inward life of the individual. *Coriolanus* represents the earlier of these conceptions. Here the State is everything ;

¹ R. G. Moulton, *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Thinker*.

and by the State is meant merely the patrician element in it; never once are the commoners regarded as having any right to consideration. Coriolanus himself openly shows his contempt of them. Menenius is willing to humour them, but with a touch of condescension, impelled by motives of tact and expediency rather than by any real regard for their rights. In this play individuality is depicted not as an ideal but rather as a disrupting force, dangerous to the well-being of the State, and therefore to be suppressed with vehemence. As the plebeians are presented here they have no ideal of their own to set up, no alternative form of government to suggest; they do not even desire their share of representation in the rule of the city. The plea which they put forward is merely individuality reduced to its lowest terms, i.e. the bare right to live. Never are they really identified with the State or the public interests. On one occasion, it is true, one of them asks 'What is the city but the people?' but no one gives serious consideration to such a suggestion. Menenius does not scruple to describe the revolt as a conflict between 'Rome and her rats', and even the citizens themselves admit to Coriolanus, when he begs their voices in support of his candidature for the consulship, that they are inspired by no patriotic motives. Declares one of them, 'You must think that if we give you anything, we hope to gain by you'.

In this play, then, Shakespeare has given us a picture of the conflict between the State and the individual, with the dice strongly weighted in favour of the State. I must, however, again reiterate the fact that this cannot be taken as betraying the dramatist's own sentiment with regard to the relations of plebs and patricians. He was merely reproducing in dramatic form the material and the fact which he found in Plutarch. The general character of the struggle was prescribed for him. What is Shakespeare's own is the elaboration of the part played by the plebs, and the nature and significance of these elaborations we have already seen.

Julius Caesar represents one further step in the evolution. The mob, swayed from side to side by all voices, is still the symbol of the lowest form of individuality, but no longer is

it distinct from the State. The 'What is the city but the people?', in *Coriolanus* a heresy, is now recognized as a fact. The plebeians are the all-powerful element, and all parties angle for their favour. Marcius could, with justification, feel it below his dignity to beg the voices of the common rabble, but Caesar accepts the position without a demur. The conspirators realize the necessity of gaining popular support, and to that end they contrive to draw Brutus into their plot, for Brutus is an honourable man, and the very integrity of his character is sufficient to win favour for any design. Brutus, Cassius, and Antony all realize that the fate of the State hangs upon that meeting in the Forum, where they all do their utmost to gain the sympathy of the people, the deciding factor. The conspirators know that they must justify their conduct to the citizens. It is not enough for Brutus that he has disposed of Caesar, his beloved friend, to satisfy his own conscience and to preserve the liberties of Rome; he must show the mob 'reasons why Caesar should be murdered'. Antony can do nothing to avenge the murder without popular support, and so he has to inveigle the crowd by displaying the cloak of the dead general and discoursing upon his bounty to the city in his will. When Caesar is offered a crown the offer comes not from the patricians but the plebs. The position of *Coriolanus* is reversed. The plebeians are now the important force in the drama. In *Coriolanus* the tragedy came primarily from within the hero himself. In *Julius Caesar* it comes primarily from without, from the citizens of Rome.

Let us now turn to the more avowedly comic of Shakespeare's low characters. Some, as we have already pointed out, are merely buffoons, but a great many of them, though outwardly comic, are no mere fools. Oftentimes these low comic figures are ironically oracular, divining the truth unawares. In *Lear*, of all the crack-brained trio on the heath, the fool is the most sensible and the most clear-sighted. His function in the play is to keep the real facts of the situation constantly before the audience. In *Twelfth Night* Feste comforts Maria with the pronouncement, 'If Sir Toby would

leave drinking thou wert as witty a piece of Eve's flesh as any in Illyria', and only at the end of the play, when Maria actually does marry Sir Toby, do we realize the real significance of these words of the clown. This may be styled an instance of comic irony. A parallel case of tragic irony appears in the porter scene of *Macbeth*. Disturbed from his drunken sleep by the incessant knocking at the door, the porter rouses himself and makes to unlock, muttering the while,

Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were porter of hell-gate, he should have old turning the key. [Knocking within.] Knock, knock, knock! Who's there, i' the name of Beelzebub?

Hell-gate? How much truth is there in the words of this intoxicated wretch! Little does he realize how like a hell the place has actually become, what torments of conscience his lord and lady are suffering even as he speaks, and that he actually is a porter at hell-gate.

We have noted already that while Shakespeare introduces some of his lower characters once only, others he keeps continually before us, and we have suggested that this latter class has usually some other function to perform than the provocation of meaningless laughter. If we examine carefully the plays in which these figures appear, we shall find that frequently they form the crux of the plot, and are the means of bringing about the final denouement. This is more often so in the comedies than in the tragedies. Dogberry and Verges are both suffering from the effects of decrepitude and senility, but Dogberry feels himself sufficiently superior to apologize for the shortcomings of his fellow watch:

Goodman Verges, sir, speaks a little off the matter: an old man, sir, and his wits are not so blunt as, God help, I would desire they were; but, in faith, honest as the skin between his brows.

It is this pair who by chance discover the conspiracy against Hero and Claudio, and so turn into a comedy a piece which has been rapidly making for a tragic ending. They may be

foolish, but they are at least wisely foolish. Their foolishness does more towards the real solution of the mystery of Hero's ill-treatment and the restoration of the normal equilibrium of life, than does all the wisdom of the other characters.

The restoration of equilibrium, and the preservation of a sense of proportion, is, in fact, the chief end of the introduction of the low comedy scenes in the tragedies. Tragedy inevitably distorts our view of things. When we have followed Hamlet through several acts, and have ourselves become infected with his melancholy, we may well lose our sense of values. We feel that these momentous happenings must spell tragedy to all the world. Ophelia's suicide is a heavy blow to the prince, but after all, he is only one small corner of the world. Now it is this last fact that we are in danger of forgetting, and Shakespeare uses the incident of the gravediggers to recall it to us. These two honest clowns represent the outside world, to whom the seemingly momentous events are nothing at all. What does Ophelia's death mean to them? Merely another woman dead, another grave for them to dig, another subject for their morbid and irreverent jests. So they recall us to an appreciation of the ultimate values of life. Or again, the knocking at the door in *Macbeth*, to the guilty pair of murderers is the knocking of the crime upon their conscience, bringing in its train horror and fear. To the drunken porter it means no more than a stranger arousing him from his sleep, and he can curse him volubly and then forget the incident. A Posthumus condemned to death is tragic enough to the victim and his friends, but the man in the street, here represented by the two jailers, takes little account of an execution. He will have his jest and pass on, to mingle with the stir and life of the great world.¹

If Shakespeare sometimes ridicules the lower orders, he frequently also uses them to ridicule others. They represent plain common sense as opposed to pedantry. This fact can be no better illustrated than by the gravedigging scene of *Hamlet*, to which reference has already been made several

¹ *Cymbeline*, v. iv.

times. A recent study of Shakespeare's legal knowledge sees in the rather nonsensical banter of the two labourers upon the right of the dead woman to Christian burial, a satire upon the refined pedantry of a learned judge of Shakespeare's day.¹ In a law case fought around the question of the succession to the property of a certain suicide, Sir James Hales by name, Serjeant Walshe submitted for the defence that 'the act of self destruction consists of three parts. The first is the imagination, which is a reflection or meditation of the man's mind whether or not it be convenient to destroy himself, and in what way it may be done; the second is the resolution, which is the determination of the mind to destroy himself, and to do it in this or that particular way; the third is the perfection, which is the execution of what the mind has resolved to do. And this perfection consists of two parts, viz. the beginning and the end. The beginning is the doing of the act which causes the death, and the end is the death, which is only a sequel of the act.' The final verdict was as follows: 'Sir James Hales was dead. And how came he by his death? It may be answered by drowning. And who drowned him? Sir James Hales. And when did he drown him? In his lifetime. So that Sir James Hales being alive caused Sir James Hales to die, and the act of the living was the death of the dead man. And for this offence it is reasonable to punish the living man, who committed the offence, and not the dead man.' The quibblings of the gravediggers are obviously a parody of these legal refinements. But in other plays, too, Shakespeare uses the lower characters to ridicule the pedantry of the upper. Dull and Costard of *Love's Labour's Lost*, with nothing but their natural dullness, serve to emphasize the unnatural and ridiculous pedantry of Nathaniel and Holofernes. Dull is, as Nathaniel describes him, a person whose 'intellect is not replenished; only an animal, only sensible in the duller parts', yet he is as effective a commentary as could be upon the affectations of the two pedants. Who can forget the incident of the 'remuneration' and the

¹ Sir D. Plunket-Barton, *Links between Shakespeare and the Law*, 1929, pp. 51-3.

‘guerdon’? Armado, the finicking gentleman, sends Costard upon a mission to deliver a letter to the maid Jaquenetta, and to requite his services he gives him a small tip or, as he styles it, a remuneration. Armado having departed, Costard thinks that he will examine the remuneration.

‘Now will I look to his remuneration. Remuneration!’ he exclaims in disgust, ‘O, that’s the Latin word for three farthings: three farthings—remuneration. “What’s the price of this inkle?”—“One penny.”—“No, I’ll give you a remuneration:” why, it carries it. Remuneration! why, it is a fairer name than French crown. I will never buy and sell out of this word.’ Shortly afterwards Biron dispatches him with a message to the lady Rosaline, rewarding him with a guerdon.

‘Gardon,’ soliloquizes Costard, ‘O sweet gardon! better than remuneration; a ’leven-pence farthing better: most sweet gardon! . . . Gardon! Remuneration!’

Could one conceive a more delicious satire than this upon the language of the courtier? In *As You Like It*, similarly, the good sense of Touchstone shatters at one blow the finicking over-refinement of the courtier Jaques, even as the untutored mind of the simple Corin holds up to ridicule the life and conventions of the court. Shakespeare at least seems to have felt that even if the common folk were uncultured and ignorant they were endowed with the common sense of nature.

What, then, are we to deduce as to Shakespeare’s attitude towards the masses? Certainly not that he despised them; nor, with equal certainty, that he idolized them. Rarely does the dramatist emerge from his plays to take sides in a question, and with regard to the plebeians he preserves his usual neutrality. All that can be said is that he attempts to give a faithful picture of them. He is decidedly not antagonistic to them. That they are less refined than the nobility he is ready to admit, yet refinement sometimes breeds vices instead of virtues. Though basically honest and sound at heart they are apt, in their ignorance, to be led away by alluring oratory, so that only too often they become the instruments of mere

demagogues. Most important of all, it is inconceivable to him that they should claim any independent existence as a class. As they are below the nobility in social station so they ape them in manners and conduct. He believed in a benevolent despotism, symbolized in the relations of old Sir Roland de Boys and Adam of *As You Like It*, a form of government for which Elizabeth herself stood.

FREDERICK T. WOOD.

A NOTE ON WORDSWORTH'S METAPHYSICAL SYSTEM

IT is salutary for one who would endeavour, as I shall endeavour in this note, to 'extract the system' from the poems of Wordsworth, to bear in mind that 'the poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human Being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a Man'¹. The primary value of Wordsworth's poetry is, indeed, the revelation of Joy 'in widest commonalty spread';—it does enable us to find, for this uneasy heart of ours,

A never-failing principle of Joy
And purest passion.

Yet Wordsworth himself, in dividing into classes the readers of poetry, tells us, 'There are many who, having been enamoured of this art in their youth, have found leisure, after youth was spent, to cultivate general literature; in which poetry has continued to be comprehended *as a study*'.² It may be conceded, then, to a Professor whose function (not alas! exercised in leisure) it is 'to cultivate general literature', that he should make a *study* of poetry, especially when he is invited thereto by the poet. For in the Preface to *The Excursion* (1814) Wordsworth, while renouncing the intention 'formally to announce a system', hopes that 'if he shall succeed in conveying to the mind clear thoughts, lively images and strong feelings, the Reader will have no difficulty in extracting the system for himself'. Let us start with this Preface, for it tells us how to proceed in our search for a system.

As early as 1795 Wordsworth had set before him the

¹ Preface to Second Edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800).

² *Essay Supplementary to Preface* (1815).

accomplishment of a great philosophical poem, 'On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life'. In March 1798, he states, in letters, that he has written '1,300 lines of a poem in which I contrive to convey most of the knowledge of which I am possessed. My object is to give pictures of Nature, Man, and Society. . . . Its title will be the *Recluse*; or *Views of Nature, Man, and Society*'. Some of these lines are embodied in the later *Prelude*, others appear in the Preface to *The Excursion* 'as a kind of *Prospectus* of the design and scope of the whole Poem'. The following passage outlines his scheme; his intention is to proclaim:

How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted:—and how exquisitely, too—
Theme this but little heard of among men—
The external World is fitted to the Mind;
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish:—this is our high argument.

In other words, he is to attempt nothing less than a solution of the problem which had puzzled the eighteenth century. Briefly put, that problem is this. On the one side, we have Man in his duality of Mind and body; on the other, Nature or the external world; Mind versus Matter. What is the link, if there is a link, between them? How does Man get his knowledge, if knowledge it can be called, of the external world? For if there is no link, there can be no knowledge; either Mind is Matter, if we follow Locke to his logical conclusions, or Matter is Mind, if we follow Berkeley to his conclusions. Crudely summarized, that is the problem. To avoid this awkward dilemma, the natural man, that is, the man who interrogates his own feelings and intuitions, his own body and mind—and the poet is the natural man raised to the highest power—Wordsworth, let us say, combines the two, and boldly asserts that reality, the world as we know it, is the creation of both Mind and Matter; we half perceive and half create; there is a 'mutual domination' and 'inter-

changeable supremacy' between Mind and Matter. That is the position reached by common sense, but it remains to justify it philosophically, and this is what Wordsworth set out to do in *The Recluse*. It was indeed a high argument, an epic theme needing the power of a Dante or a Milton. Had he that power? At first, apparently, he had no misgivings. In the glad confident morning of his genius, during those days in the West Country with Coleridge and with his sister, he began the task. But, if the talk of Coleridge could inspire, it could also bewilder with doubtful speculations. About the end of 1798 Wordsworth began to 'take a review of his own mind, and examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him for such employment. As subsidiary to this preparation, he undertook to record, in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers, as far as he was acquainted with them.'

This preliminary and autobiographical poem was completed in the winter of 1806-7 when it was read to Coleridge; but the manuscript, frequently revised, remained unpublished till the poet's death, when it appeared in 1850 under the title of *The Prelude*. Of this more anon. After finishing the first part of the great poem, Wordsworth went on to the second stage, in which, instead of 'meditation in the Author's own person', he employs 'the intervention of characters speaking and something of a dramatic form'. This, *The Excursion*, he published in 1814. In the Preface he speaks of it as the intermediate part of his poem *The Recluse*; the first part he has not completed 'in such a manner as to satisfy his own mind', and the third part is not yet in being; he publishes this instalment because 'it does not depend upon the preceding to a degree which will materially injure its own peculiar interest'. At the same time he advises the reader that it must be taken in relation with that first part (*The Prelude*), and with his other poems; he compares the whole body of his work to a 'gothic church'; *The Prelude* is the ante-chapel, *The Excursion* the body of the church, the minor poems, as he calls them, the 'little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses, ordinarily included in those edifices'.

This comparison is significant of the change which was happening in Wordsworth. The 'genial sense of youth' had left him, and Joy was no longer 'its own security'; he was beginning to lose his confidence in the 'sovereignty within' of 'natural beings in the strength of nature'; the Wordsworth who had joyously proclaimed, 'Let nature be your teacher', was turning into the Wordsworth who wrote the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*. Partly, it was a loss of 'the visionary power' which he laments in the *Immortality Ode*; partly, it was a deliberate turning away from the natural religion of his youth towards the orthodox 'piety' of his later years. Every student of Wordsworth has noted the change. It began about 1806. Professor de Sélincourt dates its beginning from the loss of his brother John in 1805. 'There is every evidence', he says, 'in the letters and elsewhere that Wordsworth was passionately devoted to his brother, and the shock of his loss seems to have made a turning-point in the poet's thought. The beginning of the change from the naturalism and sensationalism of his early poetry to a more definitely orthodox attitude dates from this time.'¹ Professor Garrod traces it to the estrangement from Coleridge.² From about 1806 Coleridge in fact ceased to be a direct formative influence in Wordsworth's life and thought. He refers appositely to the *Complaint* written in 1806: 'There is a change and I am poor.' The words, he says, are truer than Wordsworth meant them to be, or at any rate, far wider in their application. 'He is speaking of the affections. But he is poorer, not only in the wealth of the affections, but in the riches of philosophic thought.'

The real Wordsworth, the distinctive poet, is the Wordsworth of 1798 to 1807: it is to the work done in those years that we must go to find what he felt and what he thought at his best, his real system. It is true that he professes in *The Excursion* preface to regard that work as preparatory to the philosophical poem; even in *The Excursion* itself he is not prepared 'formally to announce a system'; he contemplates

¹ *The Prelude*, edited by Ernest de Sélincourt, Oxford, 1926.

² *Wordsworth—Lectures and Essays*, by H. W. Garrod, Oxford, 1923.

a further instalment of his 'sensations and opinions'; in that, no doubt, he would explain these, correlate them, and erect a theory such as he had adumbrated in the lines quoted from the *Prospectus*. But the years went on; the 'long and laborious Work' stood still; he does not seem even to have started the third part of it; instead, he went back to the first and so altered it from time to time that, when at last it was published, the 'sensations and opinions' expressed were in many passages different from those actually held and expressed in 1806. Fortunately, we are now able to read what was written in the early version and compare that with the version of 1850; for the first time we have before us that autobiographical poem which was read to Coleridge. The publication of Professor de Sélincourt's edition of *The Prelude* in 1926 was made possible 'through the kindness and generosity of the poet's grandson Mr. Gordon Wordsworth, the owner of the manuscripts on which it is based'¹. These manuscripts are described by Professor de Sélincourt; there are 'five almost complete extant manuscripts of *The Prelude* covering the years 1805–39 as well as several notebooks and other manuscripts, which contain drafts of parts of the poem, and belong to an earlier period'. In the new edition published by the Clarendon Press we have the text of 1850 side by side with the text of the poem as it was read to Coleridge, together with unpublished fragments which are often of the utmost importance. In quoting from *The Prelude* I shall refer to the early version as A and to the 1850 version as B.

We have, then, as our material from which to extract a system, the 'minor' or lyrical poems, *The Prelude* A, and *The Excursion*, and in using these three we can trace the changes in thought by reference to *Prelude* B, since the differences between *Prelude* A and *Prelude* B will help us to understand how the Wordsworth of 1814 came to differ, as *The Excursion* shows us he did differ, from the Wordsworth of 1806.

But before proceeding further it is necessary to revert for a moment to the preface to *The Excursion*, and examine rather

¹ Preface to de Sélincourt's edition of *The Prelude*.

more closely Wordsworth's words. A study of the manuscripts newly available confirms the view that Wordsworth was extraordinarily careful about his words; every one of them has its weight; we shall miss his meaning if we pass over a word without realizing the significance it had for him. This is evident from the changes he made in his manuscript. For example, in *The Prelude* A, ii. 258, the inmate of this active Universe

Even as an agent of the one great mind
Creates, creator and receiver both.

It is clear from his expressions elsewhere at this period that he believed Man to be the agent of the one great mind. Later he was afraid of this; it looked too much like Pantheism and he changed 'Even as' to 'Doth like' and 'mind' to 'Mind'. A less careful writer might argue that 'Even as' can be interpreted as the equivalent of 'like'; but Wordsworth made the change. He had all the conscientious exactitude of the great artist. For this reason it is worth while at the risk of repetition to look again at the wording of the Preface. There he tells us that he is not announcing a system, but trying to convey to the mind 'clear thoughts, lively images, and strong feelings', because that course is 'more animating' to him. The two essential phrases are, it seems to me, 'animating'—a favourite word of Wordsworth's—and 'conveying to the mind'. If one remembers his habitual process of composition and the theory upon which he worked, these phrases are illuminating.

Poetry, according to Wordsworth, 'is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on.'¹ In other words, an object, an event, let us say,

¹ Preface, 1800.

of any kind, be it physical as the sight of the rainbow in the sky, or spiritual, as the contemplation of the lonely leech-gatherer, produces a powerful emotion; the inward eye—a special faculty, distinct, apparently, from memory—is able to convey this object to the mind after the first powerful feeling has subsided; the mind, by the contemplation of this object presented to it by the inward eye, is roused, or 'animated', to an emotion kindred to that originally excited, but purged of the merely transient and associated with the permanent and universal; in this mood the creative faculty, or imagination, works, and the poem is produced. Elsewhere, Wordsworth lays stress on the necessity of this interval for contemplation; he is, e.g.,

not used to make
A present joy the matter of a song;
(*Prelude*, i. 46-7.)

and if we remember this, we shall realize the importance to him of the 'inward eye' which can recall what the 'visionary power' has once enabled him to see. His theory had been anticipated by Akenside, who expresses in the following lines precisely the same idea:

Let me once more feel
Your influence, O ye kind inspiring powers;
And I will guard it well; nor shall a thought
Rise in my mind, nor shall a passion move
Across my bosom unobserved, unstored
By faithful memory. And then at some
More active moment, will I call them forth
Anew; and join them in majestic forms
And give them utterance in harmonious strains;
That all mankind shall wonder at your sway.
(*Inscription*, viii.)

The 'active moment' here is exactly that mood of 'animation' which Wordsworth expects to follow 'by a species of reaction' on the contemplation of the emotion made possible by the 'faithful memory' or, as he prefers, 'the inward eye'.

It should now be clear what he means by 'animating' and 'conveying to the mind'. His purpose in all this poetry

preliminary to the great philosophical poem—*The Prelude*, *The Excursion*, and the other poems—is to preserve 'clear thoughts, lively images, and strong feelings' as the records upon which the imagination may work when it comes to organize or animate his feelings or intuitions, to give an intellectual life, a system, to his perceptions of truth, to bring the intimations of the heart into relation with the philosophic mind. This purpose becomes clearer still in a passage of *The Prelude*:

I see by glimpses now ; when age comes on,
 May scarcely see at all, and I would give,
 While yet we may, as far as words can give,
 A substance and a life to what I feel :
 I would enshrine the spirit of the past
 For future restoration.

(*Prelude A*, xi. 281.)

It is a pathetic passage indicating, as it does, that even when he wrote it, before 1807, he felt the 'visionary power' was passing from him ; it becomes yet more pathetic in the later version which reads,

enshrining,
 Such is my hope, the spirit of the Past
 For future restoration.

(*Prelude B*, xii. 284.)

That 'restoration', in the sense he used the word, was not to be ; what he intended by it and what he meant by 'animation', is evident from *The Prelude A*, ii. 245 (a passage which contains a significant alteration, to which reference has already been made, in the later version) :

Emphatically such a being lives,
 An inmate of this *active* universe ;
 From nature largely he receives ; nor so
 Is satisfied, but largely gives again,
 For feeling has to him imparted strength,
 And powerful in all sentiments of grief,
 Of exultation, fear, and joy, his mind,
 Even as an agent of the one great mind,
 Creates, creator and receiver both,
 Working but in alliance with the works
 Which it beholds.

The 'restoration' of which he speaks is the awakening of the 'poetic spirit', that 'shaping spirit of imagination', the loss of which Coleridge deplored in himself, and which Wordsworth no less was losing when he wrote those lines.

Enough has now been said to show that if we would 'extract a system' we must examine the records of his experience which Wordsworth has enshrined for future restoration. Having done this, we may go on to ask what kind of explanation Wordsworth himself has to offer, bearing in mind, however, that the explanation was never worked out by him formally as he had intended to work it out in the final book of *The Recluse*; all we have is a tentative approach to an explanation in some passages of *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*.

The salient fact of Wordsworth's experience is evidently his conviction of a life in things, a life which is akin to the life in man, but deeper, wider, and more intense. It is by contact with this life in things, or with Nature, that man grows in moral strength and wisdom and realizes his true immortal being. At first this contact is through the senses; it is by the eye and the ear that man becomes aware of this life of Nature, and through the eye and ear—the language of the sense—that he can listen to the voice of Nature and learn from it. In the *Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth is

well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

Therefore, he tells us, he is

A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,
And what perceive.

This latter passage introduces a new element; man is not merely recipient, but creative; he stands in Nature's presence

A sensitive, and a creative soul.

(*Prelude A*, xi. 206.)

It is not quite true, it seems to me, to assert as Professor Garrod, for example, asserts, that Wordsworth is 'a pure sensationalist', regarding the senses as the source of truth. The lines in *Tintern Abbey* with their emphasis on the eye and ear should be read with passages such as that quoted above (*Prelude A*, ii. 245) and many others where it is unmistakably assumed that reality is the result of an interaction, or

interchange

Of action from within and from without,
The excellence, pure spirit, and best power
Both of the object seen, and eye that sees.

(*Prelude A*, xii. 378.)

Here the 'eye' means, I suggest, more than the sense; it implies the 'creative soul' behind the eye. To understand this the account of the ascent of Snowdon and the meditation that follows in the last book of *The Prelude* should be read. The higher minds are

By sensible impressions not enthralld.

They

build up greatest things
From least suggestions, ever on the watch,
Willing to work and to be wrought upon.

That the 'soul' as well as the 'eye' is concerned in this intercourse with the 'great world of eye and ear' is evident from *The Excursion* (iv. 109), where he recalls

What visionary powers of eye and soul
In youth were mine.

The manuscript Y, newly available, also throws light on this matter. There Wordsworth sketches, somewhat in the same manner as in *Tintern Abbey*, the growth of the true feeling for Nature, characteristic of the higher being, as distinguished

from the mere animal delight of 'untutor'd minds'. In early days,

everyday appearances, which now
The spirit of thoughtful wonder first pervades,
 Crowd in and give the mind its needful food.

Later, 'contrasts strong and harsh' are needed to make the 'Spirits dance'; vivid images and strong sensations must be given to rouse the 'untutor'd mind' to recognition of a life beyond its own; else, the man is

his own person, senses, faculties,
Centre and soul of all.

It is this attitude that Wordsworth scorns in *A Poet's Epitaph*, the attitude of the man who relies on the 'meddling intellect'; this mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things because it makes itself the measure of all things and does not perceive the life in them,

Viewing all objects unremittingly
In disconnection dead and spiritless.

Hence his quarrel in the same book of *The Excursion* (iv. 987) with

Philosophers, who, though the human soul
Be of a thousand faculties composed,
And twice ten thousand interests, do yet prize
This soul, and the transcendent universe,
No more than as a mirror that reflects
To proud self-love her own intelligence;
That one, poor, finite object, in the abyss
Of infinite Being, twinkling restlessly.

It is important to get Wordsworth's distinction between this *Intellect* or secondary power, and the *Reason* or the mind's *excursive* power, quite clear, in order to understand how the soul and eye co-operate so that we half-create and half-perceive. Of this secondary power he speaks to Coleridge in the second book of *The Prelude* B (ii. 215):

No officious slave
 Art thou of that false secondary power
 By which we multiply distinctions, then
 Deem that our puny boundaries are things
 That we perceive, and not that we have made.
 To thee, unblinded by these formal arts,
 The unity of all hath been revealed.

Science, in his belief, will be worthy of her name, when
 her dull eye,

Dull and inanimate, no more shall hang
 Chained to its object in brute slavery ;
 But taught with patient interest to watch
 The processes of things, and serve the cause
 Of order and distinctness, not for this
 Shall it forget that its most noble use,
 Its most illustrious province, must be found
 In furnishing clear guidance, a support
 Not treacherous, to the mind's *excursive* power.
 —So build we up the Being that we are ;
 Thus deeply drinking-in the soul of things,
 We shall be wise perforce.

(*Excursion*, iv. 1254.)

The 'wise passiveness' in which we can 'feed this mind of ours' is the passiveness of this secondary power of the mind ; that other power, the excursive, is wide awake, and by it we drink in the soul of things. The senses indeed are the medium of communication, but it is this power of the mind that uses their report, and it is by this power that

sense is made
 Subservient still to moral purposes,
 Auxiliar to divine.

Hence it comes that

One impulse from a vernal wood
 May teach you more of man,
 Of moral evil and of good,
 Than all the sages can.

It does not seem to me, then, quite adequate to describe Wordsworth as a sensationalist ; truth for him is derived

from visionary powers, certainly, but visionary powers of eye *and* soul.

To revert to manuscript Y, and the second stage, to which the 'untutor'd mind' of scientists and philosophers does not attain.

Then will come

Another soul, spring, centre of his being,
And that is Nature. As his powers advance,
He is not like a man who sees in the heavens
A blue vault merely and a glittering cloud,
One old familiar pageant, known too well
To be regarded.

He takes the 'optic tube of thought', and

Without the glass of Galileo sees
What Galileo saw; and as it were
Resolving into one great faculty
Of being bodily eye and spiritual need,
The converse which he holds is limitless;
Not only with the firmament of thought,
But nearer home he looks with the same eye
Through the entire abyss of things.

In this season of his second birth,

He feels that, be his mind however great
In aspiration, the universe in which
He lives is equal to his mind;

all that he feels of dignity in himself,

Sublimities, grave beauty, excellence,

from which he gathers hope,

There doth he feel its counterpart the same
In kind before him outwardly express'd,
With difference that makes the likeness clear.

We see now how Nature can teach more than all the sages can, more effectively than art or history, for

'tis not here

Record of what hath been, is now no more,
No secondary work of mimic skill,
Transcripts that do but mock their archetypes;
But primary and independent life.

This explains the exhortation,

Come forth into the light of things,
Let Nature be your Teacher.

This conviction of 'a primary and independent life', in all about him, was Wordsworth's earliest and most abiding impression. We have the record of it in many places. There is that evening on Ullswater, when

a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct
Upreared its head

and

like a living thing,
Strode after me.

Thereafter, for weeks,

huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.

(*Prelude*, i. 400.)

He dramatizes this experience in *The Excursion*, where the Wanderer

In solitude returning, saw the hills
Grow larger in the darkness,

and

While yet a child, and long before his time,
Had he perceived the presence and the power
Of greatness.

At Cambridge,

To every natural form, rock, fruit or flower,
Even the loose stones that cover the high-way,
I gave a moral life, I saw them feel,
Or link'd them to some feeling: the great mass
Lay bedded in a quickening soul and all
That I beheld respiration with inward meaning.
Thus much for the one Presence, and the Life
Of the great whole.

(*Prelude A*, iii. 130.)

Walt Whitman records a similar feeling, and perhaps he was thinking of this passage when he wrote,

You paths worn in the irregular hollows by the road-side !
I believe you are latent with unseen existences, you are so dear to me.

One other instance must suffice, the well-known Blea Tarn episode in *The Excursion* (ii. 691), which must have been in the mind of Shelley when he wrote the similar lines in his *Mont Blanc*.¹ The two peaks that peer into the Solitary's vale, and are his prized companions, seem to be the attraction of mute agents as busy about them as thoughts in the mind of man. They yield together a harmony though there be no voice ;

the clouds,
The mist, the shadows, light of golden suns,
Motions of moonlight, all come thither—touch,
And have an answer—thither come, and shape
A language not unwelcome to sick hearts.

Hitherto we have been considering passages that record the perception of a life in things or outward objects. How does this perception affect the mind, feed it ? How can Nature be said to 'teach', to be the 'nurse, the guide, the guardian' of the heart and moral being ?

In the minor poems—those adjuncts of the main edifice in which the 'system' is enshrined—Wordsworth appears mainly to draw 'lessons' from, or moralize, Nature and natural objects in the manner of eighteenth- and seventeenth-century poets. He deduces his 'great task of happiness' from listening to 'the thousand blended notes' of early spring :

To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran ;
And much it grieved my heart to think
What man has made of man.

He is compelled to think that there is pleasure all round him, in the birds, in the primroses ; the voice of Nature bids him rejoice, and he repeats the bidding to his fellow men—take

¹ *Excursion* published 1814 ; *Mont Blanc* composed 1816.

your temper from to-day and tune the measure of your souls to love. The daisy, the lesser celandine, the primrose on the rock have each their message of cheerful resignation, fortitude, peaceful acceptance; the lark soaring above its nest tells his heart to be true to the kindred points of heaven and home; the shouting cuckoo and the mountain echo waken the thought of

Echoes from beyond the grave ;
Recognised intelligence.

In all these poems Nature may be said rather to stimulate the fancy or imagination than directly to inspire or influence the soul. In the Lucy group of poems the direct influence of Nature is more apparent. Here Wordsworth is in the line of Plato; beauty and grace in human life may grow by silent sympathy with the forms and motions of the visible world; Nature is both law and impulse,

an overseeing power
To kindle or restrain.

In *The Excursion* we are shown in several passages how strength and peace of mind may be gained, or restored, by living

Not with the mean and vulgar works of Man,
But with high objects, with enduring things,
With life and nature, purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
And sanctifying, by such discipline,
Both pain and fear, until we recognise
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.

(*Prelude A*, i. 408.)

The Wanderer is intended to represent a man who lives habitually in this spirit; he roams the country-side,

Where living things, and things inanimate,
Do speak, at Heaven's command, to eye and ear,
And speak to social reason's inner sense,
With inarticulate language.

(*Excursion*, iv. 1205.)

(Note, by the way, here, the words 'at Heaven's command'; they are indicative of the change in Wordsworth at this date

from his early natural piety to more conventional theology.) The effect of this habitual reference to universal or natural standards as more authentic than the narrower human instincts is evident in the Wanderer's reaction to the sorrowful story of Margaret, outside whose desolate cottage that story is told. At the most affecting point he breaks off and interposes,

'Tis now the hour of deepest noon.

At this still season of repose and peace,
This hour when all things which are not at rest
Are cheerful; while this multitude of flies
With tuneful hum is filling all the air;
Why should a tear be on an old Man's cheek?
Why should we thus, with an untoward mind,
And in the weakness of humanity,
From natural wisdom turn our hearts away;
To natural comfort shut our eyes and ears;
And, feeding on disquiet, thus disturb
The calm of nature with our restless thoughts?

(Excursion, i. 593.)

And when the tale of suffering is over,

Why then should we read
The forms of things with an unworthy eye?
She sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is here.

It is this peace,

The central feeling of all happiness,
Not as a refuge from distress or pain,
A breathing-time, vacation, or a truce,
But for its absolute self; a life of peace,
Stability without regret or fear;

which Wordsworth seeks and believes may be found by listening to the inarticulate language of Nature.

It may be objected, and has been objected, against him that Wordsworth 'averts his ken' from all those facts of the struggle for existence which would disturb his belief in Nature's holy plan. He was essentially of the eighteenth century in his cosmological optimism, though he broke away from its political quietism and could condemn with the loudest

of the Romantic reformers 'the panic dread of change' and the 'timid selfishness' of those who regarded society as organized in the best of possible ways. Not yet had biological research revealed the cruelties of evolution and the remorseless indifference of Nature 'red in tooth and claw'. Not yet could it be said 'Of the Kosmos in the last resort, science reports many doubtful things, and all of them appalling'.

For Wordsworth still at the end of that century as for Addison at its beginning,

The Spacious Firmament on high,
With all the blue Ethereal Sky,
And spangled Heav'ns, a Shining Frame,
Their great Original proclaim.

(ADDISON.)

Yet Wordsworth would have had an answer to the objectors, and I am not sure that he has not already given one already by anticipation. The question of origins, so distressing to the inhabitants of Dayton, Tennessee, would certainly not have given him a moment's despondency. In the person of the Solitary (*Excursion*, iii. 234) we can hear him say,

I, without reluctance, could decline
All act of inquisition whence we rise,
And what, when breath hath ceased, we may become.
Here are we, in a bright and breathing world.
Our origin, what matters it?

To those who exclaim, 'Ah! but there's the rub! It is *not* a bright world!' he would retort, again with the words of the Solitary,

I did not rank with those (too dull or nice,
For to my judgment such they then appeared,
Or too aspiring, thankless at the best)
Who, in this frame of human life, perceive
An object whereunto their souls are tied
In discontented wedlock ; nor did e'er,
From me, those dark impervious shades, that hang
Upon the region whither we are bound,
Exclude a power to enjoy the vital beams
Of present sunshine.

In the face of all the cruel elements in Nature, cruel, that is, as they appear to man with his limited outlook, to the fury of the autumn winds and the bursting clouds, he affirms,

‘ Your desolating sway
 Sheds,’ I exclaimed, ‘ no sadness upon me,
 And no disorder in your rage I find.
 What dignity, what beauty, in this change
 From mild to angry, and from sad to gay,
 Alternate and revolving ! How benign,
 How rich in animation and delight,
 How bountiful these elements—compared
 With aught, as more desirable and fair,
 Devised by fancy for the golden age.’

Yes ! that is the Wordsworthian answer. If this world is not always bright, it is breathing ; if not kindly, it is always animated. Accept it, as the animals accept it :

With Nature never do *they* wage
 A foolish strife ; they see
 A happy youth, and their old age
 Is beautiful and free.

Again he anticipates Walt Whitman, just as he anticipates Browning in ‘ the value and significance of flesh ’, and Meredith in the acceptance of Nature,

Granite the thought to stay
 That she is a thing alive
 To the living, the falling and strewn.

It is to that life of Nature we come ultimately in our search for the central point of Wordsworth’s philosophy. We have seen how Man has contact with that life through the co-operation of the senses with his soul or excursive mind, and how that contact moulds his feelings and strengthens his whole moral being. But so far that life has been regarded, even thus, as a life external to his own, linked in some mysterious way to the human soul, but not, in the strict sense, his own. In the passages which follow we advance to reality as Wordsworth conceives it, the transcendence of the senses, the time of ecstasy and union, when

Communing with the glorious universe

Man becomes a living soul ; his finite existence is one with the infinite, is ' possessed ' by it, or ' swallowed up ' in it. In this serene and blessed mood,

the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul :
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

(Tintern Abbey.)

This passage, written in 1798, may be compared with that in *The Excursion*, where he transfers to the Wanderer in youth his own experience at sunrise on a headland over the sea :

Far and wide the clouds were touched,
And in their silent faces could be read
Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
Nor any voice of joy ; his spirit drank
The spectacle ; sensation, soul, and form,
All melted into him ; they swallowed up
His animal being ; in them did he live,
And by them did he live ; they were his life.
In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God,
Thought was not ; in enjoyment it expired.

(Excursion, i. 203.)

Elsewhere (*Excursion*, iv. 1140) he compares the universe to a shell murmuring mysterious union with its native sea ;

and there are times,
I doubt not, when to you it doth impart
Authentic tidings of invisible things ;
Of ebb and flow, and ever-during power ;
And central peace, subsisting at the heart
Of endless agitation.

Here already the change is perceptible ; we have ' authentic tidings ' instead of seeing into the life of things ; it is ' to the ear of Faith ' that the universe is a shell. The contrast between the earlier and the later Wordsworth, between what he actually felt at his best and what afterwards he attempted

by way of explanation of his feeling, may be seen by comparing two passages from earlier and later work. First, this characteristic declaration from *Prelude A*, v. 12:

Hitherto,

In progress through this Verse, my mind hath look'd
 Upon the speaking face of earth and heaven
 As her prime Teacher, intercourse with man
 Establish'd by the sovereign Intellect,
 Who through that bodily Image hath diffus'd
 A soul divine which we participate,
 A deathless spirit.

The 'spiritual sovereignty' of man, the 'dignity' of his being, his 'majestic' intellect and 'unconquerable' mind, are frequently acclaimed in the years when these lines were composed, i.e. before 1807. In *Prelude A*, iii. 193, he asserts

there's not a man
 That lives who hath not had his godlike hours,
 And knows not what majestic sway we have,
 As natural beings in the strength of nature.

Note that well: we have majestic sway as *natural* beings in the *strength of nature*.

Now turn for the contrast to No. XX of the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, published in 1827, on 'Baptism':

Dear be the Church that, watching o'er the needs
 Of Infancy, provides a timely shower
 Whose virtue changes to a christian Flower
 A Growth from sinful Nature's bed of weeds !

Gone is the majestic sway we have as natural beings in the strength of Nature; what has become of the Heaven that 'lies about us in our infancy'? Here is indeed 'a heavy change' in Wordsworth, and as he changed, so he altered what he had written. The passage quoted above, characteristic as I have described it of his whole attitude at the time when it was composed, appears in the later version without the line

A soul divine which we participate,
 and, instead, we read

As might appear to the eye of fleeting time,
 A deathless spirit.

His confident conviction of participation in the divine soul of Nature, nay, his perception of the divinity of that soul of Nature itself, is now relegated to the limbo of illusion. Nature,

The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being,

is now seen as sinful, a bed of weeds! What is the cause of this remarkable change? Why does the Wordsworth of 1814 or 1827 repudiate the Wordsworth of 1798-1807? The time factor is important. Up to the completion of *Prelude A*, i.e. up to 1807, Wordsworth was recording his experience, putting down as exactly as he could what he had felt, seen, known, himself. And in this record he is unique for sincerity and honesty. His record rings true. It is not always clear, because he is trying to express at times that which cannot be expressed in words; in speaking of the deepest experience we can but appeal to the consciousness of another; we cannot narrate, we can only suggest, 'Is not this something like your own experience?' Wordsworth is aware of this impossibility of full and clear communication.

Of Genius, Power,
Creation and Divinity itself
I have been speaking, for my theme has been
What pass'd within me. . . .

but in the main
It lies far hidden from the reach of words.
Points have we all of us within our souls,
Where all stand single; this I feel, and make
Breathings for incommunicable powers.
Yet each man is a memory to himself,
And, therefore, now that I must quit this theme,
I am not heartless; for there's not a man
That lives who hath not had his godlike hours,
And knows not what majestic sway we have,
As natural beings in the strength of nature.

(*Prelude A*, iii. 173.)

Opening our memories, recalling our experience, we acknowledge the truth of his record. He has expressed what all of us in our 'godlike hours', either in the presence of Nature

or in meditation withdrawn from all outward things, have felt of immediate union with a life greater than, yet including, our own, when the soul seems to emerge and takes possession of, or swallows up, the ordinary working self, and we are . . . what? One with Nature, one with God? Or merely visited by God, or aware of God?

It lies far hidden from the reach of words.

How does Wordsworth try to describe this experience? Some of his attempts we have quoted. Here are some more.

I have felt
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man :
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things.

(Tintern Abbey.)

Often quoted as these lines are they must be quoted again, because they contain the record which Wordsworth ultimately chose, as it seems to me, as the basis for the metaphysical explanation of his experience, and we shall have to return to them. But the passages in *Prelude A* are no less significant; only now can we read them in their original form; in the later versions they are modified in accordance with the change in Wordsworth's attitude.

(a) I was only then
 Contented when with bliss ineffable
 I felt the sentiment of Being spread
 O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still,
 . . . for in all things now
 I saw one life, and felt that it was joy.

(Prelude A, ii. 400.)

In the later version this becomes:

great the joy I felt,
 Communing in this sort through earth and heaven
 With every form of creature, as it looked
 Towards the Uncreated with a countenance
 Of adoration, with an eye of love.

(b) I look'd for universal things ; perused
 The common countenance of earth and heaven ;
 And, turning the mind in upon itself,
 Pored, watch'd, expected, listen'd ; spread my thoughts
 And spread them with a wider creeping ; felt
 Incumbencies more awful, visitings
 Of the Upholder of the tranquil Soul,
 Which underneath all passion lives secure
 A steadfast life.

(*Prelude A*, iii. 110.)

This seems to describe what I have called above the emergence of the soul ; but in the later version Wordsworth separates the Upholder from the Soul by continuing from 'soul' thus :

That tolerates the indignities of Time,
 And from the centre of Eternity
 All finite notions overruling, lives
 In glory immutable.

(*Prelude B*, iii. 121.)

This places God, the Upholder, outside the soul instead of 'underneath all passion', and conforms with the conventional idea of God in his heaven (the centre of Eternity), controlling the world as the moon sways the tides.

(c) At Cambridge,

Hush'd, meanwhile,
 Was the under soul, lock'd up in such a calm,
 That not a leaf of the great nature stirr'd

(*Prelude A*, iii. 540.)

These lines do not appear at all in the later version.

(d) In speaking of the pleasure he derived from the 'elements of geometric science' at Cambridge and his attempts

to find 'an alliance of those simple, pure proportions and relations with the frame and Laws of Nature', he goes on :

Yet from this source more frequently I drew
 A pleasure calm and deeper, a still sense
 Of permanent and universal sway
 And paramount endowment in the mind,
 An image not unworthy of the one
 Surpassing Life, which out of space and time,
 Nor touched by welterings of passion, is
 And hath the name of God. Transcendent peace
 And silence did await upon these thoughts
 That were a frequent comfort to my youth.

(*Prelude A*, vi. 130.)

Here the 'Surpassing Life', 'nor touched by welterings of passion', may be compared with the 'Upholder of the tranquil Soul' in (b). In the later version the 'paramount endowment in the mind' is reduced to 'paramount belief' and the 'Surpassing Life' is further removed from 'finite natures' by the addition of the lines,

to the boundaries of space and time,
 Of melancholy space and doleful time,
 Superior, and incapable of change.

The distance between God and Man is widened again.

(e) After describing the break in the mist during the ascent of Snowdon (*Prelude A*, xiii. 67) he tells us :

A meditation rose in me that night
 Upon the lonely Mountain when the scene
 Had pass'd away, and it appear'd to me
 The perfect image of a mighty Mind,
 Of one that feeds upon infinity,
 That is exalted by an underpresence,
 The sense of God, or whatsoe'er is dim
 Or vast in its own being.

In the later version this 'sense of God' becomes 'recognition of transcendent power', and the vital conception of an 'underpresence' is eliminated altogether.

(f) In a manuscript notebook are some lines which Professor de Sélincourt prints in his edition (in the notes, p. 512). In these Wordsworth refers to the

forms and images
Which float along our minds, and what we feel
Of active or recognizable thought,

and states his belief that these are not 'our being' ;

Such consciousness I deem but accidents,
Relapses from the one interior life
That lives in all things, sacred from the touch
Of that false secondary power by which
In weakness we create distinctions, then
Believe that all our puny boundaries are things
Which we perceive and not which we have made ;
In which all beings live with god, themselves
Are god, Existing in the mighty whole,
As indistinguishable as the cloudless East
At noon is from the cloudless West, when all
The hemisphere is one cerulean blue.

The 'false secondary power' has been incorporated in *Prelude* A, ii. 216 (quoted above), but the rest of the draft remained in manuscript.

From all these passages together, and specially from the last, the most explicit of all, it is possible to obtain a clear view of Wordsworth's experience ; he tells us honestly what he felt in his moments of vision and ecstasy, without any thought of the inferences or deductions. When he came to review this experience and the language he had used in describing it, he realized what inferences and deductions might, inevitably would, be made. He was not prepared to honour those conclusions, to acknowledge them as his 'system'. A system 'in which all beings live with god, themselves are god'—that was Pantheism ! And Pantheism meant the negation of God as defined by current theology and the Church.

Such was the problem facing Wordsworth as he set about his philosophical poem. It was no new one ; but before, he had been able to leave it unsolved in the eager composition of his lyrics, expressing his feeling of joy in Nature,

Contented if he might enjoy
The things which others understand.

In those happy days of infinite speculation in company with the volatile mind of Coleridge he had ranged through the mystic philosophers, and in all of them there was a tendency to some form of Pantheism if one examined them with logical criticism. Hazlitt (*Spirit of the Age*, 1825) tells us what Coleridge was reading: Hartley's 'tribes of the mind', his 'vibrations and vibratiuncles and the great law of association that binds all things in its mystic chain'; Cudworth, Malebranche, the Platonists old and new. And what Coleridge read, he talked about, and what Coleridge talked about, Wordsworth brooded on and transformed in his own language. The two friends were attracted by the root idea of Pantheism; the simile of the *Aeolian Harp* is a favourite one with both of them at this time. In his lines with that title (1795) Coleridge asks,

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the Soul of each, and God of all ?

A reminiscence of this occurs in Wordsworth's account of his walk to Racedown in the first book of *The Prelude*:

my soul
Did once again make trial of the strength
Restored to her afresh; nor did she want
Eolian visitations.

Again in *Religious Musings* (1794) Coleridge addresses

Contemplant Spirits ! Ye that hover o'er
With untired gaze the immeasurable fount
Ebullient with creative Deity !
And ye of plastic power, that interfused
Roll through the grosser and material mass
In organizing surge ! Holies of God !
(And what if monads of the infinite mind ?)

How strangely, yet how characteristically of S.T.C., that metaphysical line is tacked on to the Miltonic apostrophe !

Wordsworth's adaptation of Coleridge's thought may be found in the famous passage of *Tintern Abbey* and again in the *Prelude A* (i. 464), where instead of 'Contemplant Spirits!' he addresses .

Ye Presences of Nature, in the sky
And on the earth ! Ye Visions of the hills !
And Souls of lonely places !

These, haunting him among his boyish sports,

did make
The surface of the universal earth
With triumph and delight, with hope and fear,
Work like a sea.

Few examples could be found better to illustrate the way in which Wordsworth reproduces and transforms in his own more emotional and concrete language the intellectual conceptions of Coleridge.

But in finding a way of escape from Pantheism, while retaining his conviction of a life in things, a soul divine which we participate, Coleridge could not help him. Those very lines which we have quoted Coleridge brands, in the same moment as he utters them, as 'shapings of the unregenerate mind', and prays that

never guiltless may I speak of him,
The Incomprehensible ! save when with awe
I praise him, and with Faith that only feels.

(*Aeolian Harp.*)

There was no help in Coleridge. As early as 1802 he had lost all his joy in

nature and the language of the sense ;
he had come to believe,

we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live . . .
We in ourselves rejoice !

And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,
All melodies the echoes of that voice,
All colours a suffusion from that light.

This would never do for Wordsworth. He could not renounce thus

the mighty world of eye and ear,

the active life in Nature; that would be fatal to his whole faith. Yet how to reconcile this faith with the teaching of the Church? When he wrote *Tintern Abbey*, the draft of *The Prelude*, and the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, he had been concerned merely with expressing his own feeling. And he had felt—it is clear from all the passages quoted—that man is, by right of Nature and not through any added act of grace, a divine being, a participator with the whole world of Nature, animate and inanimate, in the life of God. It might be shown that such a belief is not contrary to the teaching of Christ; that, indeed, it is in accord with the most vital of His recorded sayings, such as:

The Kingdom of God is within you.

What are these if not exhortations to realize the divinity in ourselves and to live habitually in the strength of this knowledge? However, the question whether Wordsworth's early faith is consistent with Christianity as taught by Christ is one for the theologians to decide; there is no doubt that it was inconsistent with Christianity as taught by the Church of England in the nineteenth century. This was a serious consideration for Wordsworth. Remember that he claimed to be a teacher; his poetry was to console the afflicted, to guide the simple. During the years that succeeded his first settlement at Grasmere he had opportunities of seeing how intimately the Church as a national institution entered into the common life of the people among whom he lived. Let us not here join in the gibe that it was the 'respectability' of the established religion his desire to stand well with the temporalities and powers (his brother Christopher was moving upward in the ecclesiastical hierarchy), that influenced Wordsworth and induced him to make those alterations in the manuscript of *The Prelude*. One has only to read *The Excursion* to see how his own feeling had changed between 1806 and 1814. Partly, this change was due, as I have hinted, to his perception of the

social value of the Church, its civilizing influence, as well as of the very real comfort afforded by its dogmas and sacraments to those who accepted and used them. As an institution it was a substantial part of the fabric of national life; its history was inseparable from the history of England, as his friend Southey was to show in his *Book of the Church* (1824). From shore to shore the steeple-towers and spires spoke to the 'thronged abodes of busy men' and the 'rustic wilds' alike as symbols of the spiritual world. As he thinks of them he exclaims,

may ne'er
That true succession fail of English hearts,
Who, with ancestral feeling, can perceive
What in those holy structures ye possess
Of ornamental interest, and the charm
Of pious sentiment diffused afar,
And human charity, and social love.

(*Excursion*, vi. 23.)

Partly, there was a change—deterioration, if you will—in his inward feeling. In the *Ode* he had lamented how the shades of the prison-house begin to close upon the growing Boy and the years bring the inevitable yoke. It is

the most difficult of tasks to *keep*
Heights which the soul is competent to gain.

The conviction of 'spiritual sovereignty' had been shaken by the experience of life, till all he can confess in 1814 is,

Man is of dust; ethereal hopes are his.

(*Excursion*, iv. 138-40.)

The *Ode to Duty* (1805) reveals the beginning of the process which is shown completed in the inscription *Near the Spring of the Hermitage* (1818):

Troubled long with warring notions
Long impatient of Thy rod,
I resign my soul's emotions
Unto Thee, mysterious God!

No wonder then that, looking back to the draft *Prelude*, he now found it not completed 'in such a manner as to satisfy

his own mind'. His philosophical poem was designed to show how exquisitely the individual mind is fitted to the external world, and how exquisitely, too, the external world is fitted to the mind. He might claim to have shown that by the record of his experience in the poems and in *The Prelude*; but a philosophical poem must go further and give some metaphysical theory of the connexion. The metaphysical basis upon which, apparently, he had been building seemed to him, now that he came to examine it, too pantheistic in appearance. He had to find a theory that should account for the existence of a real life in Nature and in man and the possibility of complete interaction or communion between them, while preserving distinct from either the life of God, who should be presented as influencing, controlling the life of man and Nature, imparting, indeed, that life to them, yet—and this was the danger-point—not as identical with either of them.

He found, I suggest, the clue for which he was looking in the history of the conception of motion. He might well be led to this by reflection on the language in which he had himself attempted to speak of the one great life in man and things. Is not motion the one attribute of that life which appears most prominently in all the passages where he describes it, from the simplest lyrical utterance to the most impassioned outbursts of mystical fervour?

To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran.

Authentic tidings of invisible things ;
Of ebb and flow, and ever-during power ;
And central peace, subsisting at the heart
Of endless agitation.

The mist, the shadows, light of golden suns,
Motions of moonlight, all come thither—touch,
And have an answer—thither come and shape,
A language . . .

And all
That I beheld *respire* with inward meaning.

A motion, and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought
 And rolls through all things.

Now we know from *The Prelude* (vi. 115, a portion of which is quoted above) that in his undergraduate days he 'was interested in 'geometric science' and specially delighted with

that clear Synthesis built up aloft
 So gracefully, even then when it appear'd
 No more than as a plaything, or a toy
 Embodied to the sense, not what it is
 In verity, an independent world
 Created out of pure Intelligence.

(*Prelude A*, vi. 162.)

Notice the 'even then'; evidently he came to value this 'Synthesis' more in later years. The same increase of respect may be found in his references to Newton, the greatest figure in this history of the conception of motion. Wordsworth has not much to tell us about the intellectual influences of Cambridge, but he does mention the effect upon his mind of living where 'spiritual men' had moved, and first of these spiritual men he mentions:

Even the great Newton's own ethereal self.

That adjective 'ethereal' is significant, as we shall see later. Again he recalls his bedroom in St. John's College, whence he could see the statue of Newton in the antechapel of Trinity. In the first draft (*Prelude A*. iii. 58) the impression was fresh and he gives particular details:

And, from my Bedroom, I in moonlight nights
 Could see, right opposite, a few yards off,
 The Antechapel, where the Statue stood
 Of Newton, with his Prism and silent Face.

On revision, in accordance with his usual practice, he cuts out these particular details 'right opposite' and 'a few yards off', but adds two lines—among the best in the whole poem—which indicate, I suggest, that his appreciation of Newton had deepened.

And from my pillow, looking forth by light
Of moon or favouring stars, I could behold
The antechapel where the statue stood
Of Newton with his prism and silent face,
The marble index of a mind for ever
Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone.

(*Prelude B*, iii. 58.)

In the interval between the draft and the revision Wordsworth too had been voyaging through strange seas of Thought, and in that voyage he had found, I believe, a chart to steer by in the work of Newton. For Newton's problem had been similar to his own. Let us briefly summarize it to show the similarity. In the physical philosophy of the eighteenth century there were, roughly speaking, two views of the relation of God, the creator, to the universe, the creation—*Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*. According to the one view, represented by Leibnitz, God makes the world and then allows it to run as a machine runs. The Supreme Being is regarded 'as bearing the same relation to the Universe as a watchmaker bears to a watch'. According to the second, represented by Descartes and Boyle, God intervenes to keep the machine working, or, to continue the metaphor, is constantly winding up the watch and oiling its parts.

Newton, as a theist and a churchman, deeply interested in theological speculations, rejected this conception of the Universe as a machine. For him the whole universe was directly animated by God present in every part of it. In the *Optics* (Query 28) he speaks of God as 'a Being incorporeal, living, intelligent, omnipresent, who, in infinite space, as it were in his Sensory, sees the things themselves intimately, and thoroughly perceives them and comprehends them wholly by their immediate presence to himself'. A recent writer, Mr. A. J. Snow, from whose book on *Matter and Gravity in Newton's Physical Philosophy* these excerpts from Newton's works are taken, sums up his position thus: 'As man has a consciousness which is his Sensorium of action, so God has a soul which is space. But as "God needs no particular organ to operate" as the human soul does, God and His divine

Sensorium are the same; God becomes the "Soul of the World", being immediately substantially present everywhere—although Newton tried to guard himself against Pantheism.'

When Newton, at the end of his *Principia*, comes to a metaphysical as distinguished from the mathematical theory of gravity, he rejects the Cartesian conception of Motion as an attribute of matter—a mechanistic conception at variance with his view of God as 'a powerful ever-living Agent who, being in all places, is more able by his will to move the Bodies within His boundless uniform Sensorium and thereby to form and reform the Parts of the Universe'. He puts forward, instead, the hypothesis of an immaterial principle or ethereal spirit (effluvium) as the cause of Motion. 'Hitherto,' he writes, 'we have explained the phenomena of the heavens and of our sea by the power of gravity, but have not yet assigned the cause of this power. This is certain that it must proceed from a cause that penetrates to the very centres of the Sun and planets without suffering the least diminution of its forces. . . . And now we might add something concerning a certain most subtle spirit which pervades and lies hid in all gross bodies by the force and action of which spirit . . . bodies attract . . . cohere. . . . Seeing, therefore, the variety of motion which we find in the world is always decreasing, there is a necessity of conserving and recruiting it by active Principles, such as are the cause of Gravity.' Reading the words of Newton and recalling the words of Wordsworth, I am led, not fancifully I trust, to the conjecture that when Wordsworth was seeking for a metaphysical theory of his perception of the universal life as 'a motion and a spirit that impels all thinking things, all objects of all thought, and rolls through all things', he found it in Newton. Like Newton he rejected the watchmaker conception of God; he was aware of a life in things, he had *felt* and *seen*; like Newton, again, he wished to guard himself against the charge of Pantheism. Is it improbable, therefore, to conjecture that he saw in these 'active principles' of Newton the hypothesis that would solve his problem? Consider the impressiveness of the reference to Newton in *The Prelude*;

does it not seem that there is a special significance in the adjective 'ethereal' applied to him, reminiscent of his hypothesis of 'ethereal spirits', the term which he uses elsewhere for the 'active principles' in the passage quoted? Consider again the language of that passage—'subtile spirit', 'pervades', 'lies hid in all gross bodies'—is it not the very language which Wordsworth uses again and again? Surely, if he went back to read Newton again, as I believe he did, after writing the draft of *The Prelude* and before writing *The Excursion*, he would find that language congenial and the theory it enunciates appropriate to his purpose. And he uses that theory, I believe, in the one passage in all his work in which he attempts to give a formal explanation. Elsewhere he is recording, as I have reiterated, his experience, telling us what he has seen and felt. In *The Excursion* he begins the real work of his philosophical poem, to explain the relation between Man and Nature. And there is one passage in *The Excursion* which contains all that he has to give us of formal explanation. It stands at the beginning of the final (ninth) book, and is evidently intended to be the climax. The varying discourse of the Wanderer, the Solitary, and the Pastor prepare the way for it, and the excursion on the lake with its combination of beautiful scenery with human incidents provides the setting. It is the Wanderer, i.e. Wordsworth dramatized, who speaks,

as One

Who from truth's central point serenely views
The compass of his argument.

The eighth book closes with this preparation, and the ninth opens with the following lines :

'To every Form of being is assigned',
Thus calmly spake the venerable Sage,
'An *active* Principle:—howe'er removed
From sense and observation, it subsists
In all things, in all natures; in the stars
Of azure heaven, the unenduring clouds,
In flower and tree, in every pebbly stone
That paves the brooks, the stationary rocks,
The moving waters, and the invisible air.

Whate'er exists hath properties that spread
Beyond itself, communicating good,
A simple blessing, or with evil mixed;
Spirit that knows no insulated spot,
No chasm, no solitude; from link to link
It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds.'

Both in the language of this passage and in its thought, there is evidence, I submit, for the indebtedness of Wordsworth to Newton, and this is the only passage in which he attempts a philosophical explanation of his belief. In it he achieves, as far as it could be achieved, the reconciliation of that belief with orthodoxy. The active principle, which subsists in all things and circulates from each to each, is *assigned* to every Form. In this way he avoids the identification of God with Nature, while providing an explanation of our feeling of participation in the life of Nature. He goes on subsequently to apply this explanation to his favourite theme by showing, as the argument prefixed to the book has it, 'How lively this principle is in Childhood—Hence the delight in old age of looking back upon Childhood'.

With this explanation the great philosophical poem comes to an untimely end. He must have felt it was inadequate; he intended to proceed with his poem—Dorothy's letters show that—but doubtless he realized more and more as time went on that his first instinct was right; he must be contented to enjoy; let others understand. In attempting the great theme he had essayed in his philosophical poem he was setting out on strange seas of thought, and he feared the currents might lead him to regions still stranger. He put back to port. 'It is not the Author's intention formally to announce a system.' His biographers record that Wordsworth had little sense of humour; but was there not, perhaps, a smile on his austere face when he penned that conclusion to his preface, 'the Reader will have no difficulty in extracting the system for himself'?

S. G. DUNN.

BISHOP PERCY AND THE SCOTTISH BALLADS

VERY slowly but surely Bishop Percy is coming into his own. This is a natural result of the recent revival of interest in the eighteenth century as a whole ; a revival which is clearly visible in such publications as Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Letters*, Gibbon's *Journal*, the new edition of Goldsmith's *Letters*, the exhaustive bibliography of Boswelliana, as well as the continuous output of Johnson literature. But so far, Percy has not received adequate attention. Yet there is no one better suited to act as a representative of the second half of the eighteenth century. His life covers the whole of this latter half. He was a contemporary of all the great figures of the period and, what is more, he was acquainted with them all. An ardent 'lion-hunter' and a successful place-seeker, he lived in a round of perpetual tea-parties and receptions. Further, he was an insatiable correspondent. The extant corpus of his correspondence in bulk almost rivals the Horace Walpole collection. Not only did he diligently exchange letters with Shenstone, Dalrymple, and the Warton brothers, but also established communication with the Duchess of Northumberland and other remoter planets who moved into his ken from time to time. Only a third of this correspondence has ever been printed. It seems that a thorough biography is necessary to do justice to a man so full of many activities. Such a biography would also do inestimable service as a guide-book or map to this abundant period, revealing much information about the literary and social activities of the time. Meanwhile, we will confine ourselves as rigidly as may be to one episode in his busy life.

Percy's correspondence with the Scottish antiquarians begins late in 1762. In November of that year he tells Shenstone that 'Scotland is the only quarter, where I have not established a good correspondence for promoting my ballad-scheme'.

Before the month was out he had begun to exchange letters with Sir David Dalrymple. Meanwhile, Shenstone had established relations with John McGowan : 'I come to ask, whether you have any old Scotch ballads, which you would wish preserved in a neat edition. I have occasioned a friend of mine to publish a fair collection of the best old English and Scotch ballads ; a work I have long had much at heart. Mr. Percy, the collector and publisher, is a man of learning, taste, and indefatigable industry' (letter to McGowan, 24 Sept. 1761 ; reprinted *Edinburgh Annual Register*, 1809). But to his constant vexation, Percy did not receive the long-awaited packet of ballads from this source until August 1763. With George Paton of the Custom House, Edinburgh, Percy did not begin to correspond until 1768 ; but the extant letters show how regular were their discussions during the next ten years.

The Academy of Letters in Scotland at this time was represented by the *Select Society* at Edinburgh, which met weekly in the Advocates' Library to discuss matters literary and philosophical. A selection from its list of membership will show its importance and its interest for us : Dr. Robertson, Adam Smith, David Hume, Lord Kames, Hugh Blair, Sir David Dalrymple, Allan Ramsay (son of the ballad collector), John McGowan. With this group Percy and Shenstone managed to establish close contact, chiefly with a view to gaining access to the repositories of ancient Scottish lore. Shenstone introduced Percy to McGowan, and Percy intended in his turn introducing Shenstone to Dalrymple. 'I shall be happy in being the instrument of introducing my friend Mr. Shenstone to the acquaintance of a Gentleman he so much admires. And am equally obliged to you for your good offices with Mr. McGowan' (letter to Dalrymple, 12 Feb. 1763). But on 14 April 1763, Percy has to begin his letter to Dalrymple thus : 'I sh^d think it incumbent on me to make many apologies for my long silence, but that I flatter myself you must have attributed it to its true cause, the ever-to-be lamented Loss of my elegant and amiable friend Mr. Shenstone. . . . Three or four lively Papers with which you honoured Mr. Dodsley's *World* were what had struck him, and what he had pointed

out to me. Had he not been so fatally snatched away, I flatter myself I sh^d have been a means of bringing him acquainted with the author of those Papers: for your name was the favourite subject of the last letter I wrote to him.' Very soon Percy extended his acquaintance to include Richard Graham (Librarian at the Queen's Palace), John Davidson (Clerk to the Signet), Alexander Brown (Chief Librarian, Advocates' Library); and later, George Paton. The literary society of the time in Edinburgh represented a variety of interests, chiefly philosophical rather than literary and antiquarian. Percy was then well advised always to state the objects of his inquiries explicitly, and to waste no time before getting into touch with the right people: 'what I chiefly want to recover are these fine old historical songs, which are only preserved in the memories of old people, . . . collections of the common historical ballads &c., such as are usually sold by ballad-singers rather than the known poems of old poets like Barbour, Lindsay, &c.' (letter to Paton, 12 Jan. 1769).

Curiously enough, Percy's first object in corresponding with Dalrymple was to invoke his aid for the edition of Buckingham's works which was then in hand; and his first letter (10 Nov. 1762) is full of talk of textual difficulties, collation of editions, &c. But Dalrymple, in reply (18 Nov.), pleads his inability to elucidate conundrums in seventeenth-century plays, and passes on at once to a subject obviously nearer to his heart: 'Give me leave, Sir, to ask what progress you have made in your collection of Old Songs.' Henceforth the 'Old Songs' proved the all-important topic, especially after Percy had virtually abandoned his proposed work on Buckingham and Surrey, &c., and become deeply immersed in his preparations for the *Reliques*.

Almost half a century afterwards, when collecting his letters, Percy communicated with Lady Dalrymple, who was also endeavouring to collect her husband's letters. She writes in Nov. 1802: 'I am no stranger to the friendship that subsisted between your Lordship and my husband. I have often heard him mention it with pleasure, and also your correspondence on the subject of Popular Scottish Poetry. There

are, I know, a good many letters of yours to Lord Hailes preserved, which shall certainly be transmitted to Dr. Anderson, according to your Lordship's directions. . . . I believe it is the wish of many of Lord Hailes's friends, that a complete collection of his publications should be made, as well as some account of his life given; . . . If your Lordship has happened to preserve any of Lord Hailes's letters, that you think may be of use in assisting any attempt that may hereafter be made to give some account of his life, Miss Dalrymple and I will take it as a particular favour if you will transmit them to us at your leisure.'¹ Unfortunately, Percy could make no adequate return in kind for the gift of his own letters, as the following quotation will show: 'In answer to a former request of mine, for any of Lord Hailes's letters you might have by you, I recollect that you said a great many of them had been lost in the fire in Northumberland House (1780),² but you was [sic] so good as to say, that if any still remain you would transmit them' (Lady Dalrymple to Bp. Percy, Aug. 1803).³

Sir David Dalrymple (Lord Hailes) was a much respected lawyer and scholar in his day. His range was limited, but within the limits of Scottish antiquities his knowledge was sound. Gibbon singles him out in his *Memoirs* as an opponent worthy of respect: 'In his *Annals of Scotland* (his 'magnum opus', 1776, &c.) he has shown himself a diligent collector and an accurate critic.' Dalrymple had entered the lists to champion Christianity against Gibbon's indictment in 1780, in various *Observations*. His other publications were an edition of *Edom O'Gordon* (1755), *Memorials and Letters* of the reign of James I (1762) and Charles I (1766), an edition of *Ane Compendious Booke of godly and spiritual sangs* (1765), and *Ancient Scottish Poems* from the Bannatyne MS. (1770). We learn from Percy's *Diary* that the two correspondents met in

¹ Nichols's *Illustrations of Literature*, vii. 108.

² Cf. 'At 5 in ye morning a dreadful fire in Northumb^d House w^{ch} totally consumed my apartment & destroyed many books; but the most valuable & especially my choicest manuscripts were saved. (Soli Deo Gloria !)' (Percy's *Diary*, 18 March 1780).

³ Nichols's *Illustrations*, viii. 375.

Edinburgh for the first time in October 1765. Percy did not meet Paton until the summer of 1773.

A first glance will indicate that the nature of this group of letters is rather different from that of the correspondence carried on with Thomas Warton, or Evan Evans the Welsh scholar. Here the writers are concerned not so much with the bigger questions of ancient history and mythology, as with the details of ballad-texts and the history of individual poems. So the chief feature of this group is the methods of ballad-editing and collecting adopted by these scholars. There has always been much discussion of Percy's editorial methods; and after the publication of the *Folio MS.* in 1867, analysis of these methods proved popular literary sport. But even then, though students had the original *Folio* texts to lay alongside the versions in the *Reliques*, the detailed stages of emendation and the various motives of the editor for emending remained unknown. Now, in these particular letters, it may be fairly claimed that we can take a human interest in the question for the first time; and, by realizing many of Percy's reasons for adaptation, understand the eighteenth-century mind a little more fully.

In his first letter to Dalrymple, 2 Dec. 1762, Percy makes it clear that Scottish ballads are to be a prominent feature of his forthcoming anthology, and loses no time in soliciting the help of his correspondent. 'As I intersperse some Scottish Ballads in my Collection I shall thankfully receive any new-discovered curiosities of that sort; & shall be extremely obliged to you, Sir, for any information relating to those already printed.' Truth to say, Percy knew very little indeed about Scottish history or Scottish dialects, and wisely cast himself on the mercy of his correspondents. Fortunately for him and his *Reliques* he met with nothing but kindness on their part, and a readiness to help which must have been extremely gratifying during the critical years 1762-5. In this first of his letters to Dalrymple he refers to dozens of ballads which he was then transcribing and annotating; and towards the end he gives the titles of one rare bunch of songs. 'I have a great profusion of Ballads written on Scottish subjects & especially on the Feuds between the English & Scots on the

borders. Perhaps an enumeration of their Titles may remind you of their contents & be a means of procuring me more correct copies; *Mus-leborrow field*, imperfect. *Kinge James & Browne*. *The heire of Lin*. *The Lord of Lorne*. *Scottish Field*. *Flodden Field*. *John a side*. *Northumberland betrayde by Douglas* (Temp. Q. Elizabth). *Bishoppe & Brown*. *Bell my wife* (an old English Copy of the Song *Auld Cloak*). *Young Andrew*. *Thomas O'Potte*. *Sir John Butler*. *The Child of Ell*, imperf. *Will Stewart and John*. *Sir Andrew Burton*. *Scroope & Brown*. *Christopher White*. *Durham Field*. Of this group from the famous *Folio MS.*, after further study and investigation, only half a dozen were finally incorporated in the *Reliques* (namely, the second, third, eighth, tenth, fourteenth, and sixteenth, here listed in this order). The ballad of *The King of Scots and Andrew Browne* (*Reliques*, vol. ii) is an interesting example of the editor's methods. It is mostly derived from *The Bishoppe and Browne*, with concluding verses from *Kinge James and Browne*, both to be found in the *Folio MS.* But Percy chose to print his version from a copy found in the archives of the Antiquarian Society!

One of the chief matters for discussion was the possible Scottish origin of many of the items in Percy's *Folio*. Having enumerated a score of titles (as above), he remarks: 'All these I have in an ancient MS. Collection, & from some Vestiges of Scottish Idiom have reason to believe they were originally written in the Scottish Dialect.' In his next letter (7 Jan. 1763) he tells his correspondent that in the *Folio* there is an English version of *Edom O'Gordon*, which Dalrymple had previously edited (1755). 'In my ancient MS. Collection of Old Ballads . . . is a fragment of a very pathetic old Ballad, that evidently is upon the same subject, altho' the Idiom is English, and the names of persons and places different. The tyrant of this piece is named *Adam Curre w^{ch}* is not very remote from *Edom O'Gordon*. I have inclosed a Copy for your Inspection. I think if a few of the Stanzas were to be reduced to Scottish Idiom and inserted in your Scottish Ballad, they w^d contribute to its improvement.' In the same letter, he criticizes his own version of *Gil Morrice*, which in the *Folio*

is entitled *Childe Maurice*: 'You will wonder to see it so strangely corrupted, but I have many such pieces wherein some blind harper or common ballad-singer has not only dropt the Scottish Idiom, but inserted a deal of vulgar trash of his own.' He indicates his own intentions further on in this long letter: 'It were to be wished some of them could be revised and the ancient Scottisms restored by Conjecture. And should any improvement either in sentiment or expression occur, I should not scruple to insert it, provided it were not inconsistent with the general plan or style of the Poem.' In his attempts at restoring what he deemed the original 'Scottisms' in his ballads, he constantly encountered difficult words and phrases, which he duly submitted to Dalrymple. 'May I intreat the favour of your opinion of the following: In *Ewbughts Marion* (*Reliques*, vol. iii) the words Ewbughts: blyth-blinks in your eye: hauss-banes: pearlins: kirtle o' th' cramasie. In the *Gaberlunyie Man* (*Reliques*, vol. ii): to the bent they are gane: milks to earn: kauk and keel. In the Ballad *Gil Morrice* (*Reliques*, vol. iii): rin errand [is not something wanting here ?]: triest furth: sall find frost', and many more (letter of 7 Jan. 1763).

The only available aids from books were apparently the glossary to Gawain Douglas's translation of the *Aeneid* (1710), and the 'vocabularies' in Allan Ramsay's *Evergreen*. Many lines in the old poems continued to baffle our industrious editor up to the time of going into print: 'I am now drawing up my Glossary for the second volume, which is almost printed off; in some of the Scottish Ballads I meet with expressions which the Glossaries I have at hand either wholly omit, or do not explain to my satisfaction' (11 Oct. 1763).

In *Robin and Mukyne*, we learn from the same letter there were still many 'obsolete phrases' awaiting interpretation. *Lord Thomas and Fair Annet* also presented many a textual problem, and 'the printers will soon call upon me for the explanations'. Then there was *Sir Andrew Barton* with its annoying stanza

Fight on, my men, Sir Andrew sayes,
Weale howsoever this geere will sway,

By 11 Feb. 1764, the first two volumes of the *Reliques* were in print, and a copy was sent to Scotland for confidential criticism: 'Mr. Dodsley desires y^e 2 first Vols. may be seen by no eyes but your own.' The editor encloses a proof copy of the new text of *Edom O'Gordon*: 'I know not how far you will admit the alterations & enlargements: they were in some measure pointed out by my late friend Mr. Shenstone, who left among his papers some hints how & where he could wish the alterations might be made.' Moreover, he is exceedingly anxious to know whether 'I have sufficiently succeeded in Scotifying the English stanzas'. There are still several awkward phrases such as 'luiks to freits', and 'he wreiked his teen'. He suggests as a last resort omitting some stanzas, which 'I do not understand, & think if they were wholly thrown out, the poem would hasten more rapidly to a conclusion'. But Dalrymple solved most of his difficulties by return post, and in a letter of 28 Feb. Percy gratefully acknowledges the solutions. Having got rid of textual problems for a while, the indefatigable editor turns his attention to his essay on 'The Origin & Conduct of the English Stage'. The letters exchanged during April 1764 are devoted to drama, and the English antiquarian obtains much useful information about medieval drama in Scotland, interspersed with lengthy quotations from the *Scotch Acts* (duodecimo edition, 1682), and the *Booke of the Universal Kirk of Scotland*. In the throes of final preparations Percy consulted his friend about such unexpected items as a frontispiece for his anthology, and even the wording of his dedication. Last minute queries continued to crop up, the busy compiler knew no rest, and only the Edinburgh scholars could help with the 'Scottisms'. 'Mr. Johnson (Author of the *Rambler*) who has been with me for 2 months past on a Visit & left me but last week, gives them up as inexplicable: and as he has a good deal of *Glossarizing* knowledge, it will be some honour to succeed, after he has given them over' (21 Aug. 1764).

Percy and his correspondents saw nothing particularly criminal in adapting old poems to contemporary literary fashions and taste. He was quite ready to believe that *Edom*

O'Gordon and *Gil Morrice* ‘rec'd some beauties in passing thro' your [i.e. Dalrymple's] hands.—This was not only an allowable freedom (if they did) but absolutely necessary to render them worth attention’ (7 Jan. 1763). He then adds significantly: ‘You will hence infer that I take the same liberty myself; I do, when it seems wanting.’ The *Child of Ell* is to be ‘corrected by your elegant pen’ (to Dalrymple, 3 Nov. 1763); and, between them they make milk-and-water of it. ‘You will also observe that the conclusion even of this copy is wanting: I am tempted to hazard a few stanzas of my own by way of conclusion & would beg your opinion whether I shall make it end happily’ (14 April 1763). The ancient ‘Scottisms’ can be restored by conjecture in many ballads, and ‘improvements either in sentiment or expression’ effected (7 Jan. 1763). The important thing was to concoct a complete story in each ballad for the readers of 1765, who were much more interested in stories than in facsimile texts of fragmentary poems: hence so imperfect a story as *Edom O'Gordon* was to be ‘improved’ at all costs: ‘what if that stanza (i.e. the Husband leaping into the flames) is wholly omitted, and we draw a veil over the husband's situation’ (Percy's letter, 28 Feb. 1764). In this way Percy tinkered shamelessly with *Sir Cauline*, introducing several new incidents needlessly into a story already complete. The original in the *Folio* ends somewhat abruptly, but strongly and finally: whereas Percy's version drags on its weary length through more than a dozen additional stanzas, and all done in the best eighteenth-century style of sentimental pastoral poetry,

The ladye blushed scarlette redde,
And fette a gentill sighe, &c., &c.

But his ‘improvements’ were not always for the worse, by any means: the *Heir of Linne*, for example, has gained the approval of many later scholars, including Francis James Child. Furthermore, we remember his environment, and the spirit of his age, and that he was editing for the readers of 1765, and not 1932. It is interesting at this distance of time to recapture some of the thrill which Percy felt at the first hint of the existence of certain famous ballads. Towards the

end of 1762, 'in the Cotton Library (British Museum) I found a very ancient *Songe on the battle of Otterbourne*, much more true to History than the ballad of Chevy Chace' (letter to Dalrymple, 2 Dec. 1762). A few weeks later he hears of *John Anderson*: 'I thank you for the Droll Catch. I believe I shall insert it if it be only for the sake of the Anecdote that belongs to it' (25 Jan. 1763). A few months later he hears the first mention of *Sir Patrick Spens*: 'I should be glad to receive your old copy (imperfect as you are pleased to represent it) of the song beginning "The King sits in Dumfirline towne"' (16 June 1763). By August of this year he had received a copy, and he is anxious to know all its historical background: 'I am fond of the poem, I would pick up information concerning it from every quarter.' The following November he received a note on this famous poem from Richard Graham, who first discovered it with 'an old Lady Dowager of Blantyre'. Thus he went on his way rejoicing, jubilant at each find and ever willing to exchange 'curious information'. Ballads are discussed also in the correspondence with George Paton, but by no means with the frequency and fullness of the Dalrymple correspondence. Percy had published two editions of the *Reliques* before beginning to correspond with Paton; and Paton as a bibliographer was more interested in editions of printed works than in culling oral songs and traditions. These letters are generally short, and often resemble mere business notes of query and acknowledgement. Books on Scottish history and literature were recommended to Percy in large numbers—Mackenzie's *Scots Writers*, Hamilton's *Life of Wallace*, Harvey's *Life of Bruce*, Thomson's *Orpheus Caledonius*, &c. Many books were also sent on loan, and some 'for keeps'—*Booke of Godly and Spiritual Songs* (edition of 1600), *Works of Sir David Lindsay* (ed. of 1668), James Watson's *Collection of Scottish Poems* (1713), &c.

The Scottish scholars displayed unfailing courtesy and kindness throughout their intercourse with Percy, and readily acceded to all his demands for collations, transcripts, and loans of rare books. But the signal proof of their generosity and confidence in Percy was their willingness to lend him their

precious Bannatyne MS. for two years. He seems to have first heard of this famous manuscript in Jan. 1763, when Dalrymple, who was one of the Curators of the Advocates' Library, mentioned that it had been mislaid and could not be found for a while. By 1772, Dalrymple had published his selection of *Ancient Scottish Poems* (1770) from the manuscript, and Percy was collating these with the versions of the Maitland MS. in the Pepys Library. Ultimately his curiosity to see the Edinburgh MS. was so piqued that he begged leave to indulge his 'extravagant Wish . . . which is to borrow the Manuscript itself of his Lordship (Lord Hyndford), and I beg the favour of you to inform me, whether you think I could by any means obtain so great an Indulgence' (23 Aug. 1772). Not long after he realized his ardent desire, for on 9 Jan. 1773 he tells Paton that 'Mr. John Davidson (one of the clerks of the signet) is to send me up a manuscript, of which Lord Hyndford has procured me the loan out of the Advocates' Library'. The precious packet reached Northumberland House (London) by the end of April, and Percy immediately acknowledges its receipt: 'This day (27 April 1773) is borrowed by me Thomas Percy, out of the Library belonging to the Faculty of Advocates at Edinburgh, a MS. Collection of Poems (writ by George Bannatyne & lately presented to the said Library by the Earl of Hyndford) to be returned in six months.' This period proved too short, and he begged for an extension of time, which was courteously granted: 'Some weeks ago I received your letter from Mr. George Paton; it was laid before the Gentlemen who have the immediate direction of our Library, and, sensible of the reasonableness of your Request, they have desired me to inform you that you have their permission to use Bannatyne's MS. Poems for two or three months longer' (Signed, Alexander Brown, 15 Nov. 1773). After this it seems that further extensions of time were allowed periodically, and Percy did not dispatch the manuscript for Edinburgh ultimately until 28 July 1775. Alexander Brown acknowledges its return in a note, dated 1 Sept. 1775: 'By the Hands of my good friend Mr. Geo. Paton I have received Ballentyn's (*sic*) MS. Poems which you had in Loan from our Library. And

it is with great pleasure that I can add that the Book is not only in the same state of preservation in which it was when lent but is much improved by the additional references which you have taken the trouble to make in the Index. I have delivered your Receipt to Mr. Paton who will obligingly transmit it to you.' Such was the free and easy intercourse of these scholars of a bygone age. An interesting fact in this connexion came to light recently when it was conclusively shown that at this time Percy also borrowed transcripts of David Lyndsay's 'Interludes' made by Allan Ramsay much earlier in the century from the same Bannatyne MS. (English Association, *Essays and Studies*, 1921, 'A Bundle of Ballads', by Geo. Neilson). From other similar cases we also learn of Percy's painstaking collation of transcripts with their originals, and obtain ample proof of his scholarly methods of work. The loan of the valuable Bannatyne for two years enabled him to verify and check innumerable items.

One of the best comments on this age, more especially with reference to its taste in poetry, was made by Shenstone in a letter to McGowan (24 Sept. 1761). The first instalment of *Ossian* had just appeared, and after remarking that 'it seems to be a very favourable era for the appearance of such irregular poetry', he makes a characteristic statement: 'The public has seen all that art can do, and they want the more striking efforts of wild original, enthusiastic genius.' Finally, he hits off the situation exactly by saying 'that the taste of the present age is somewhat higher than its genius'.

NOTE ON SOURCES

The Percy-Dalrymple correspondence is preserved in Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 32331, and consists chiefly of letters written by Percy, i.e. of the forty-eight letters extant only four are by Dalrymple. Thirty-seven of Percy's letters to George Paton were printed for private circulation at Edinburgh by Stevenson in 1830, from the Paton Papers in the Advocates' Library. Paton's letters to Percy are to be found in B.M. Add. MS. 32332, which contains fifty-eight letters in all. The Percy-Shenstone correspondence was edited by Hans Hecht from B.M. Add. MS. 28221 and published at Strassburg in 1909.

A. WATKIN-JONES.

THE L'ESTRANGE-PEACOCK CORRESPONDENCE

THE biographers of Thomas Love Peacock, from Sir Henry Cole to Dr. Carl van Doren, have been greatly indebted to the zeal of Thomas L'Estrange, who has indeed some claim to be considered the earliest of them, if a twenty-five-line notice of a living contemporary, contributed to a work of reference, may confer biographical rank. Yet L'Estrange's work has remained unknown. Cole, in the unpublished and undated *Biographical Notes* of which he printed ten copies in 1874, quotes Peacock's letters to and from 'Mr L'Estrange, of Belfast'. Peacock's grand-daughter, Edith Nicolls, in the *Biographical Notice* she contributed to Cole's edition of her grandfather's *Works*, introduces the man at whose urgent instigation she wrote, and to whom she submitted her material for advice, and her proofs for correction, as 'a Mr Thomas L'Estrange, of Belfast'. Dr. A. B. Young copies her use of the indefinite article.¹ So does Dr. Carl van Doren, who says of Peacock that 'Between 1860 and 1862 he wrote a few letters to a Mr Thomas L'Estrange of Belfast, an ardent admirer, but they contain little besides bare biographical or bibliographical details'.² This is true—what else could be expected in replies to an unknown correspondent who asked for such details?—but the facts disclosed by Peacock are of the utmost value, and no one else troubled to extract them from him. The index of the latest account of Peacock, contributed by Mr. J. B. Priestley to the English Men of Letters series in 1927, is innocent of any reference to L'Estrange. It is time that justice should be done to his pioneer work.

Thomas L'Estrange was a Belfast solicitor, with a taste for the classics and for English poetry, a sardonic wit, a sceptical outlook on the Christian religion, and no belief in a future

¹ *The Life and Novels of Thomas Love Peacock*, Norwich, 1904, p. 19.

² *The Life of Thomas Love Peacock*, 1911, p. 257.

life. In May, 1860, he opened a correspondence with Peacock, whom he never met ; and a little sheaf of nine of his letters, written from October 1, 1860, to May 5, 1863, survives among the family papers of the late Mrs. Clarke (Edith Nicolls), who also preserved a series of thirty letters addressed to herself from 3 Chichester Street, Belfast, from March 17, 1873, to February 26, 1875. The manuscript notes on Peacock's life, written for Edith Nicolls by his cousin Harriet Love, are liberally annotated in L'Estrange's hand, and fragments of six of the eight letters from Peacock to L'Estrange were printed by Cole in his *Biographical Notes*. On this material the present article is based.

L'Estrange's first letters were not preserved by Peacock, whose earliest known reply, written on May 2, 1860, survives only in an extract printed by Cole :

I did not translate the *Œdipus Coloneus*. The four lines from it were inserted in a little poem called *Rhododaphne*, published by Hookham, in 1818.

Of a further reply of July 3, 1860, Cole printed two fragments :

The lines from Sophocles, in *Rhododaphne*, formed a portion of some translations of Greek choruses, which I made in 1812 and 1813, but of which I never published any but those four lines.

I suppose you have had the first edition of the *Genius of the Thames* ; the second is somewhat altered. I am unable to supply you with a copy of the first edition of *Palmyra*. It was a very juvenile production, and was almost entirely re-written in the edition which I now send, and which must be the edition alluded to by Shelley.

There is nothing to show what allusion had been mentioned, but Shelley had a very high opinion of the revised version of *Palmyra*, and had written to Thomas Hookham, on August 18, 1812, that its conclusion was 'the finest piece of poetry I ever read'.

The first extant letter from L'Estrange, written, like all his letters to Peacock, from 3 Donegal Square East, Belfast, is dated October 1, 1860, and runs as follows :

Sir

Your kindness in replying to my friend Mr Brett¹ extends to me and induces me to request the favour of a reply to one question further. Before asking it, however, I must say a word in explanation. I have succeeded in obtaining the following works by you, namely, *The Genius of the Thames*, *The Philosophy of Melancholy*, *Rhododaphne*, *Headlong Hall*, *Melincourt*, *Nightmare Abbey*, *Maid Marian* and *Crotchet Castle*. The only other work by you that I know of (besides those and *The Four Ages of Poetry*) is *The Misfortunes of Elphin*. Would you oblige me by letting me know where it is to be had and also by saying if you be the author of any other works and where they are to be had? —I have experienced great difficulty and delay in obtaining those I have. As I am addressing you I do not feel at liberty to say how much I admire them, but I may be permitted to observe that your allusion to 'a volume of Miscellanies' leads me to express a hope that you will republish your poems which, if they fell into oblivion would be an irreparable loss to English literature.

In order to understand clearly your paper on Shelley published in January last I should like to know whether he contributed to his wife's support in any way after getting the annuity of £1000 in 1815.

As I know you admire accuracy permit me to observe that the lines 'A man so various' &c are not Pope's but *Dryden's*. I allude to *Gryll Grange* ch: xvi.

I feel that I have no excuse to offer for thus troubling you and can hope only that you will pardon me.

Your obedient servant

Thos L'Estrange.

The 'volume of Miscellanies' was for some time contemplated by Peacock, but was never prepared for the press. The 'paper on Shelley' was Part II of the *Memoirs of Shelley* (*Fraser's Magazine*, January 1860). At the time of this letter, *Gryll Grange* was appearing as a serial in *Fraser*; L'Estrange's correction was embodied by Peacock in the first edition published in book form, in 1861.

Peacock replied in a letter which Cole ascribes merely to

¹ The firm of l'Estrange and Brett was prominent among the Belfast solicitors of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

November, 1860', and from which he prints the following extract :

My first article in the *Westminster Review* was in October, 1830, on Moore's *Epicurean*. The others were in the three or four following years ; I cannot give the dates nor the order ; but they were on *Jefferson's Memoirs and Correspondence*, *French Comic Romances*, *London Bridge*, *Moore's Life of Byron*, *Bellini*, and *Lord Mountedgecomb's Musical Reminiscences*. Some of these were in the *London Review*, which was carried on for a short time by the original contributors of the *Westminster*, in consequence of some schism. The two were afterwards re-united. My contributions to *Fraser* are as follows : March, 1852, *Horæ Dramaticæ*, No. 1 ; April, 1852, *Horæ Dramaticæ*, No. 2 ; October, 1857, *Horæ Dramaticæ*, No. 3 ; April, 1858, *Chapelle and Bachaumont* ; June, 1858, *Memoirs of Shelley*, part 1 ; November, 1858, *Athenian Translations from Sanscrit* ; March, 1859, *Müller and Donaldson's History of Greek Literature* ; January, 1860, *Memoirs of Shelley*, part 2 ; March, 1860, *Letters of Shelley* ; April, and following numbers, 1860, *Gryll Grange* ; this will be completed in December, when I shall reprint it in a volume.

The list is of great bibliographical importance ; it includes all but five of Peacock's published articles for the periodical press, the exceptions being *The Épicier* (*London Review*, January 1836 ; signed 'M. S. O.', like the other three contributions to that paper) and *The Abbey House* (*Bentley's Miscellany*, February 1837), both of which he probably forgot ; *Gastronomy and Civilization* (*Fraser's Magazine*, December 1851), which would be omitted as written in collaboration with his daughter and published over her initials, 'M. M.' (Mary Meredith) ; the article on Steam Navigation to India for the *Edinburgh* of January 1835, which would naturally be excluded as official and technical ; and *The Four Ages of Poetry*, the existence of which was already known to L'Estrange.

No answering letters from L'Estrange have been preserved, but from Peacock's next reply, of July 11, 1861, Cole printed this extract :

The death of my friend, Mr. Parker, junior, suspended my pursuits, so far as writing is concerned. For some time past I have done little else than read Cicero. But I have thought of a

new work, which I shall probably commence when the time returns for lighting fires ; and about the same time I shall again think of my *Collection of Miscellanies*. In the questions which have come within my scope, I have endeavoured to be impartial, and to say what could be said on both sides. If I have not done so, it is because I could find nothing to say in behalf of some specific proposition, as in *Gryll Grange*, page 171. The 'dingle', in *Crotchet Castle*, is a real scene, on the river Velenrhyd, in Merionethshire.¹ There is no chasm on that river which it is possible to leap over ; but there is more than one on the river Cynfael, which flows into the same valley. I took the poetical licence of approximating the scenes. That on the Velenrhyd is called Llyn-y-Gygfraen, the Ravens' Pool.

Gryll Grange had been published by 'Parker, Son, and Bourn' in the previous February, and ten years earlier the Parkers had also published the volume of poems dedicated to Peacock by his son-in-law George Meredith. The 'new work' in contemplation was probably his translation of *Gl' Ingannati* (1862). The 'specific proposition', for which there was nothing to be said, was Competitive Examination, which had been roundly attacked by Doctor Opimian at the end of the nineteenth chapter of *Gryll Grange*. *The Dingle*, in *Crotchet Castle*, is the title of Chapter XIV.

L'Estrange's reply, on July 14, gives some indication of the part of Peacock's letter omitted by Cole. It runs :

Sir

Accept my thanks for your letter of the 11th instant.—I am aware that George the third did much for England by his setting an example of frugality and also by his breaking, in 1767 and 1783, the power of the Whig families which might otherwise have left us no alternative between submission to an oligarchy and civil war ; but when his frugality sprung from avarice and his hostility to the Whigs from his love of arbitrary power I cannot regard him as a patriot ; yet rather than venture to obtrude any thing like a dispute on you I am content to accept what you

¹ A fine photograph of 'The Dingle in *Crotchet Castle*' was included recently in the 'Landscape and Letters' series in *The Times*, in which it occupies the upper half of p. 14 of the issue of Friday, December 30, 1932.

say as an explanation of the matter so far as you and *The Genius of the Thames* are concerned.—I accept in a more satisfactory sense your explanation regarding the drift of your novels; but I do not seem to have made myself sufficiently clear. You may be impartial to the disputants whom you bring forward; but you do the Tories the favor of *not* bringing them forward except in *Melincourt*, and I intended to ask why you do them this favor.

I am particularly obliged to you for your information regarding The Raven's [sic] Pool: to me it greatly increases the beauty of 'the Dingle'.

Mr Brett and I have searched *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* for Roxburgh, but in vain. The only thing we can see regarding it is a note on the Eve of St John. You would greatly oblige me by informing me what the associations connected with *Roxburgh* are that should cause the minstrel to lean on its ruined wall.

In case you publish your intended volume of Miscellanies I venture most respectfully to suggest a reprint of the first edition of *The Genius of the Thames*. This is due to the said Genius on account of the manner in which some critic—friendly I suppose—caused you to clip, attenuate, and generally disfigure him in 1812. I have never known a work of genius improved by a critic: he may pick holes or discover defects but I have never known him fill the former or mend the latter. Perhaps you might improve *The Genius of the Thames* by (i) changing the word 'roaring' in the first line of the first edition, (ii) by *saying* nothing about the patriotism of George the third, (iii) by introducing the passage in the second edition regarding 'woody Marlow's winding vale', and (iv) by making the notes more explanatory. In all other respects the first edition seems to me perfect. I know that I have no right to offer these suggestions, but as I do so from a sincere—an almost enthusiastic—admiration for that poem I feel you will excuse me.

I have read your review of Dr Donaldson's continuation of Müller's *History of Greek Literature*, and it reminds me to refer you to Dr Thirlwall's *History of Greece* vol: i, p: 238-248, where he propounds what seems to me the only rational solution of the Homeric question, namely, that it is more probable that Homer was acquainted with the art of writing than that even during a few generations there were a succes-

sion of Homers who kept alive the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In this case scepticism while trying to solve a difficulty has had recourse to the hypothesis of a miracle. A succession of Homers! such nonsense! Beside such a supposition that of apostolical succession descends into the region of every day life; for if the writers of the Bible were inspired *What*¹ must Homer have been !!

I beg to apologise for this letter which I assure you I should never have troubled you with, were it not that I wish to make myself clear to you.

Your obedient servant
Thos L'Estrange.

It is evident from this that in a previous letter, to which Peacock was replying on the 11th, L'Estrange had challenged the lines in the first version of *The Genius of the Thames*:

Thy pure waves wash a stainless soil,
To crown a patriot people's toil,
And bless a patriot king.²

In the second edition, in 1812, Peacock had omitted the last line.

L'Estrange's inquiry about Roxburgh relates to the paragraph, found in both versions of the poem, which begins:

The minstrel oft, at evening-fall,
Has leaned on Roxburgh's ruined wall.³

Peacock answered this letter in detail in a reply, on July 26, from which Cole gives a long extract:

You will find in the notes to the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, a good deal about the Scots and Kerrs; and an intimation, in the note c. i. st. 8, 'that the Duke of Roxburgh represents Kerr at Cessford.' The old castle was a place of great importance during several centuries, till it was destroyed, in 1460, by the widow of James the Second of Scotland, who had lost his life while besieging it, by the bursting of one of his own cannons. The ruined walls, when I saw them fifty-five years ago, were standing on a high, wooded mound, near the confluence of the Tweed

¹ The word 'What' is both written and underlined in red ink.

² Peacock's *Works*, Halliford edition, vol. vi, p. 367.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

and the Teviot. I have not here a copy of the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. If I have said lately nothing about the Tories, it arises from my considering them to be as completely extinct as the Mammoth. Their successors, the Conservatives as they call themselves, appear to me like Falstaff's otter, 'neither fish nor flesh'; one knows not where to have them. I could not, in a dialogue, put into the mouth of one of them the affirmation of any principle which I should expect him to adhere to for five minutes. I am not a fair judge of George the Third. I passed many of my earliest years in the neighbourhood of Windsor, where he was certainly popular. He lived much in public, attending every day at Ascot and Egham races, riding on horseback in the park and forest. There was not a trace, then, of the system of exclusion which has destroyed to me all the charm of the neighbourhood. Subsequently, too, I liked to see him at the theatre. He went week after week to Covent Garden, and there was something very genial in his hearty enjoyment of Comedy. You see I have pleasant associations with him, which have nothing to do with politics, but have their influence in judgment of character. I quite agree in your red ink question about Homer. I agree, too, with your opinion on the reconstruction of poems in deference to criticism—that the practice usually spoils them, is unquestionably true. I will think of your suggestions, but I defer all literary speculations till the return of regular daily fires.

Peacock had wandered alone in the Scott country in the autumn of 1806, and in a letter of November 28, 1808, he had asked Edward Hookham: 'Did you stand by twilight in that romantic wood which overhangs the Teviot on the site of Roxburgh Castle?'

On September 17 L'Estrange wrote to enclose 'a little poem called *Sunday*' (which, however, in a postscript he found himself unable to send at present), and to inquire what really was the position Peacock had maintained in *The Four Ages of Poetry*, for he had 'written and advertised for a copy of Ollier's *Miscellany* in vain'.

Again on April 23, 1862, he sends a letter beginning :

Sir

Permit me to return you my sincere and warmest thanks for your mention of me in your letter to my friend Mr Brett, and

to assure you I do not wish you to undergo the exertion of writing to me so long as it would be an exertion to you to do so: the circumstance of my being in your kind remembrance I esteem an honor and feel it a pleasure more than sufficient for me.

This letter L'Estrange not unsuitably calls 'this "vote of thanks",' for he remarks—*inter alia*—that he does 'not know any English poem equal to the first edition of *The Genius of the Thames*', and expresses a strong desire

to see your versions of Greek choruses made in the years 1812 and 1813 and mentioned in your letter to me of the 3 : July 1860; for next to *The Genius of the Thames* I most delight in your *Horæ Dramaticæ*: the chorus commencing 'Hymen, oh Hymen, now we sing' is painfully beautiful.

Peacock did not answer, and on June 19 L'Estrange wrote:

Sir

I confess your long silence compels me to fear that I have written or enclosed you something which has displeased you, and if such be not the case your letting me hear to that effect I should esteem the greatest kindness.

Your obedient servant

Thos L'Estrange.

This produced a reply of June 23, from which Cole quotes a single paragraph which is the chief authority for Peacock's schooling and education :

I did not go to any University or public school. I was six years and a half at a private school on Englefield Green. I left it before I was thirteen. The master was not much of a scholar; but he had the art of inspiring his pupils with a love of learning, and he had excellent classical and French assistants. I passed many of my best years with my mother, taking more pleasure in reading than in society. I was early impressed with the words of Harris: 'To be competently skilled in ancient learning is by no means a work of such insuperable pains. The very progress itself is attended with delight, and resembles a journey through some pleasant country, where, every mile we advance, new charms arise. It is certainly as easy to be a scholar as a gamester, or many other characters equally illiberal and low. The same application, the same quantity of habit, will fit us for one as completely as for the other.' Thus encouraged, I took to

reading the best books, illustrated by the best critics; and amongst the latter I feel especially indebted to Heyne and Hermann. Such was my education.

This is the last of the extracts printed by Cole from Peacock's letters to L'Estrange. Of L'Estrange's own subsequent letters, four are extant. He wrote at once, on June 26, to acknowledge 'your very kind letter of Monday last, which gave me the greatest pleasure. The only alloy it contained was the intelligence of your not having been very well.' The passage from Harris's *Hermes*—'an old acquaintance of mine'—he remembered well; and after making a plea that the episode of the Druid, in *The Genius of the Thames*, should be transferred to the end of the second part of the poem (a plea supported by 'the example of Virgil in his *Georgics*', when 'he reserves the episode of Aristæus until the very conclusion of his poem') he concluded with, 'The hope of seeing the "little paper" to which you allude in your letter gives me great pleasure'. There is nothing, however, to show what the 'little paper' may have been, though L'Estrange's second letter to Edith Nicolls proves that Greek type was needed for its composition, and it seems probable that it consisted of Peacock's Greek verses (now lost) against Christianity.

Later, on August 3, L'Estrange wrote to inquire 'what was the occasion of your writing the stanzas at sea commencing,

Thou white-rolling sea! from thy foam-crested billows'¹ quoted in a note to *The Genius of the Thames*, and to call attention to 'a curious reminiscence of Shelley in Captain Gronow's late publication, page 212'².

A reply from Peacock, on August 19, is mentioned in the next of L'Estrange's extant letters, on April 1, 1863:

Sir

Mr Wilson sent me a manuscript copy of your *Four Ages of Poetry* of which I have had some copies printed³ to bind with

¹ Halliford edition, vol. vi, p. 95.

² In the *Reminiscences of Captain Gronow*, 1862, pp. 212-15 contain anecdotes of Shelley at Eton and elsewhere.

³ See the Bibliographical Note to *The Four Ages of Poetry* in the Halliford edition, vol. viii.

your other works and for private distribution. I enclose you one copy and if you wish for a few more you can have them.

I have been expecting the volume of miscellanies and the name of the sea alluded to in yours of 23: June and 19: August last but suppose they have escaped your recollection. If your health permit I should be gratified by a line from you with the name of the sea.

I request your acceptance of the enclosed little poem, *Easter Week*, and remain

Your obedient servant
Tho^s L'Estrange.

Peacock, however, wrote no more to L'Estrange after August 1862, though there remains one further letter to him, in which, on May 5, 1863, L'Estrange writes :

Sir

About a year ago you explained a Latin enigma: perhaps you could explain the Greek enigma on the other leaf.¹ I can translate it, but I cannot even guess its solution.

I hope I am not too troublesome, though, indeed, I have so frequently experienced your kindness that I have almost no right to offer you an apology.

Your obedient servant
Tho^s L'Estrange.

Peacock died on January 23, 1866, and seven years later his grand-daughter, Edith Nicolls, was interesting herself in the first collected edition of his *Works*, then being prepared by Cole. Finding L'Estrange's letters, she evidently wrote to him for any replies he had received. His answer, dated March 17 1873, runs as follows :

M^{rs} Nicholls,² &c. &c.

Madam

It would give me much pleasure to contribute in any way to the reediting of the late M^r Peacock's witty tales and beautiful poems. I certainly have some letters from him but I am at a loss to know where they are. Since I last heard from him,

¹ The enigma follows : ten lines of prose, beginning 'Εἰμὶ δ' ἔγώ ὁ ἔων.'

² This becomes 'Miss Nicholls' in the second and third letters; the fourth has no name, but still begins 'Dear Madam'; in the remainder this becomes 'Dear Miss Nicolls'.

Aug : 1862, I have changed my residence. My wife is from home. But when she shall have returned I shall make a search for the letters and if I find them they shall be forwarded to you.

I contributed a brief notice of M^r Peacock to the edition of *Men of the Time*, which appeared in 1865. Since then I found a volume of poems written by him, and printed but not published in 1837.¹ If the Editors would let me see a programme of what they intend publishing I might be able to offer some suggestions that would lead to some useful result.

He published two editions of *The Genius of the Thames*. The second was very much inferior to the former. No doubt the second edition contained two or three improvements. I admired the poem so much that I made an edition² for myself, which might be worth reprinting.

Also he made some contributions to *Frazer* [sic]. One of these was a review of D^r Donaldson's *History of Greek Literature*,³ which is a decidedly valuable paper, but requires some notes and corrections. If the editors would let me revise and annotate it I would undertake the pleasing task with alacrity and zeal.—The same remark applies to his *Memoirs of Shelley*, 1858 and 1860.

Hearing of this new edition is like meeting one of 'the illustrious dead' on 'the meadow of asphodel': I wish the undertaking every possible success.

Believe me, Madam,
Truly yours,
Thos L'Estrange.

Peacock had first appeared in *Men of the Time* in the edition of 1862, which contained the following brief notice :

PEACOCK, THOMAS LOVE, was born about 1790, and entered the Home Civil Service of the East-India Company at the age of thirty. He succeeded the late Mr. James Mill as Examiner of Indian Correspondence, and held that post until succeeded by Mr. John S. Mill. He is an eminent classical wit, and a gentleman of high scientific acquirements. Mr. Peacock is the author of several works of fiction, including *Headlong Hall*, *Crotchet Castle*, *Maid Marion* [sic], and *Gryll Grange*.

¹ This was the privately printed edition of *Paper Money Lyrics*.

² The 'edition' consisted of a copy of the first edition altered by hand.

³ Cole did not include it.

L'Estrange's account, in 1865, appeared without any indication that it was 'contributed', but was much more full and accurate :

PEACOCK, THOMAS LOVE, born at Weymouth, October 18, 1785, was educated at a school at Englefield Green. In 1810 he published a classical poem, *The Genius of the Thames*, which reached a second edition in 1812, when he published another poem, *The Philosophy of Melancholy*, followed, in 1818, by *Rhododaphne*. In 1816 was published his novel of *Headlong Hall*, which was followed by *Melincourt*, 1817, *Nightmare Abbey*, 1818, *Maid Marian*, 1822, *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, 1829, *Crotchet Castle*, 1831, and *Gryl Grange*, 1861. In 1812 he became acquainted with Shelley, and eventually became his chief friend and executor. Mr. Peacock obtained a situation in the East India House in 1818, and on the death of Mr. James Mill, in 1836, was appointed Examiner of India Correspondence, which post he held until March, 1856, when he retired on a pension.

No originals, or copies, of Edith Nicolls's letters to L'Estrange are extant, but his next reply is dated March 20 :

Dear Madam

Knowing the Bristow family only by sight I forgot what you mention about them in connexion with the late Mr Peacock. The fact is I have a bad head for pedigrees, and I am not by any means proud of my own supposed descent from a long line of jackals for whom we search in vain in connexion with the petition of right, the long parliament, or the warrant for the execution of Charles the first. However, I shall not fall into the mistake a second time.

Lord Macaulay said that five years form a long space in the life of mortal man. After the lapse of twelve years reading over Mr Peacock's eight letters to me I perceive that although they were interesting to me at the time they cannot now give other people the slightest amusement, except, possibly, the letter of 26 July 1861. However, I enclose them for your inspection, and you may take ample time to consider them.

The Paper-money Lyrics are the poems I alluded to, but had forgotten their names, and writing from my office, I was unable to refer to the volume. The other poems and dramas you mention I never heard of. There was not any intimacy between Mr Peacock and myself. Our correspondence began in May

1860, and terminated, rather suddenly, in Aug: 1862. I am under the impression that shortly after Mr Peacock's death his son wrote to me to the effect that his father during the last few years of his life had intended doing several things and writing to several people, but did not do so. By the way, in his letter to me of 23: June 1862 you will perceive he speaks of a little paper in the hands of a printer at Chertsey, who was delayed by want of Greek type. I should like to know what became of it.

It is curious that I saw some weeks ago in some newspaper, I think, an observation to the effect that Mr Peacock's tales were very witty, very well written, and at one time popular; but that they were now almost utterly forgotten. In my humble judgment the explanation of the phenomenon is this. Mr Peacock's literary period lay between the years 1816 and 1831: from *Headlong Hall* to *Crotchet Castle*. At that time no one ever thought of abolishing Greek as one of the tests for a university degree. This is not the case now. The University of London has abolished that test. The statesmen of those times used to quote from Greek and Latin poets in their speeches, even Lord Melbourne did so. None but a favoured few dare to do so now. In short those whom Mr Peacock used to call contemptuously 'the reading public' were better educated than their descendants. We have many more readers than were in existence in 1831, but their education is very mercantile.

Dear Madam,
Very truly yours,
Thos L'Estrange.

The whole of the last paragraph is marginally marked with a line of red pencil, probably by Cole, who quoted it (with trivial verbal omissions) as the concluding paragraph of his *Notes*.

L'Estrange's next reply, on April 7, assures Edith Nicolls that she is welcome to keep the eight letters as long as she wishes. She had evidently sent him, for elucidation, Peacock's Greek verses against Christianity; he explains their import, but thinks them too controversial for the intended edition. He emphasizes his preference for the earlier form of *The Genius of the Thames*, and on April 14 proposes to forward 'a copy altered by myself twelve years ago: thereby offering suggestions for a new edition'. This he sent on July 16, with a

letter which begins : 'There is a saying here that "it is needless to make two bites of a cherry". Since leaving Dublin University, 1844, I so neglected the little ha'p'orth of Latin I brought away with me that I cannot construe an ordinary Latin quotation now without a dictionary, which Payne Knight says "is the remembrance of a scholar and the oracle of a dunce". It is better, therefore, to have the Greek and Latin papers you refer to examined by an expert in both tongues.' Later in the same letter he most willingly undertakes to 'examine the list you refer to whenever you send it to me. But allow me to say that some of your Grandfather's reviews were not very good hits.' That of Moore's *Life of Byron*, and the article on *London Bridge*, are given as examples : 'I cannot possibly see the use of publishing the *failures* of a great man.' Cole omitted all the reviews except the *Memoirs of Shelley*.

The next reply, on July 21, opens vigorously with 'I protest against the first edition of *Palmyra* and the second edition of *The Genius of the Thames*' (a fruitless protest, for Cole printed both, though he gave footnotes of readings from the first edition of *The Genius*). L'Estrange also renews his objection to *London Bridge*, and suggests the exclusion of *The Philosophy of Melancholy* and the *Paper Money Lyrics*. 'As for the articles I have not seen, all I shall say is Do not publish a tract, a novel or a poem merely because your Grandfather wrote it.' But he adds 'His lines on Newark Abbey contain the best poetry he ever wrote. Be sure to insert them.'

The next surviving letter was written almost a year later, on July 7, 1874, in reply to one from Edith Nicolls which must have accompanied the first proof of Cole's *Biographical Notes*. It runs as follows :

Dear Miss Nicolls

Accept my best thanks for your favor of the 5th inst.

Before reading it I read, last night, the proof, and made some typographical and 'mild' corrections. But when I read your request 'to correct, suggest, and criticise these notes to my utmost' I could not feel I would be acting the part of a friend to either yourself or the memory of your Grandfather if I did not point out what appear to me to be very grave blemishes.

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This I have done in red ink in a manner (to use his own words) 'that speaks for itself, and admits of no misunderstanding'. If it be that I have written too strongly, it is because I take an interest in the subject. The people I abuse most warmly are those I care most for.

But the chief defect of the *Notes* is they do not give any palpable idea as to what sort of a man Mr Peacock was when in the prime of life—not even the color of his hair! A hundred years hence a writer (like myself) could very easily raise a suspicion whether there ever was any such man as 'T. L. P.'; and not only that, but bring forward arguments to prove that *Headlong Hall*, &c. &c. were really written by my maternal great-grandfather, Sam: Judge, who, 'for fear of mistakes', as *he* said, 'always spelled the word *come* with a K.'—Seriously: you should give some description of 'T. L. P.' as he was in 1818 or 1831. The retired scholar and grandfather is very well described in pages 38–9.¹ But you should give us some idea of him 'as he appeared' when he wrote the letter of 20: Novr: 1819.²

I feel highly complimented by his honouring me with the few letters he was so kind as to send me. Rest assured I do not feel less honoured by your kind consideration for me, and if you wish me to revise your 'revise' before the 26th inst. I shall willingly do so, if you send it to me.

Returning, as I do, your 'proof' at the earliest possible moment is some *proof* that I mean what I say.

Believe me,

Very truly yours,

Thos L'Estrange.

By July 11 (after writing a further letter on the ninth which was lost in the post) he has received a reply, which he acknowledges with great relief that his criticism has been taken in good part, 'because it is such a dangerous thing to find fault even with the best intentions'. But he renews his emphatic demand for personal details:

The worst part of your *Notes* is the utter absence of every thing palpable about 'T. L. P.' We know that when David Hume fell through the frail drawingroom chair of his friend Mr Adam and lay on the floor much disgruntlified he observed 'Maister

¹ These pages are evidently largely written by Edith Nicolls herself.

² The proposal of marriage to Jane Gryffydh.

Awdom should provide strownger chairs for heevy pheelowersphers'. Also when he returned from France with his essay *On the Idea of Necessary Connexion* in his trunk, his mother was asked by a friendly neighbour what sort of a young man her Davie was; to which she replied 'Och! our Davie's a fine, braw creether: but *muckle wake-minded*.'¹

Can you not ferret out some analogous anecdotes relative to T. L. P.? Two such would be worth all the rest of the *Notes* taken together. As for any knowledge of his person or character I know not a particle more now than I did when first I heard from you.

Any advice, revision, criticism, or pen-and-ink work of any kind, at any season of the year, that you may wish to have from me is most heartily at your service.

The letter closes with a final demand for 'flesh and blood'.

L'Estrange's next reply, on July 15, shows the first effect of his criticism, for it opens: 'You are worthy of your illustrious Grandfather. Your revise is a very great improvement. I return it with my observations in blue ink.' But he repeats, from the lost letter of the ninth, a caution against making the edition too voluminous: 'You are trying to reanimate a lethargic fame: conceal every thing that is likely to dim it.... Do not let your three volumes be very bulky or expensive.' He urges 'the omission of the attacks on the University of London, and the like',² and offers to give an opinion on the Greek words in the journal (Peacock's diary of 1818) if he can have the manuscript as well as the revise.³ After pointing out that 'to a person unacquainted with "the beauties of Peacock" the *Notes* are almost entirely void of interest' and that 'except at the end they avoid every thing likely to interest the reader', he concludes: 'Let me have the re-print as soon as you please and I shall go more particularly than ever into the matter.'

The next letter, on July 18, congratulates Edith Nicolls on

¹ Underlined in red ink.

² Halliford edition, vol. vii, pp. 240-1. This had been printed in Cole's *Notes* (pp. 23-4), which L'Estrange had before him. Edith Nicolls took his advice, and omitted it from her *Notice*.

³ Cole had made desperate work with the Greek of the diary, as indeed he did with any fragments of that language throughout his edition.

her 'determination to exclude *Melincourt* and *The Philosophy of Melancholy*, and all the magazine articles except *Horæ Dramaticæ* and *Shelley* . . . *Melincourt* is great nonsense', though 'the exquisite little poem on the *Sundial*'¹ must be preserved. He is very glad indeed to hear that she intends 'to remodel the *Notes*. . . . Whenever you let me see them (as the poet Tupper says) "I'll perform my Protestant part as a man"!' The letter ends with the postscript, 'Did your grandfather not care for Charles Lamb? If not, pray tell me why? I am curious to know.' No doubt this question was passed on to Harriet Love, whose notes supply the answer.

A further long letter, on July 21, suggests the republishing only of *Headlong Hall*, *Maid Marian*, and *Elphin* among the novels, with the best of the incidental poetry from the other four.

The next, on July 28, begins 'I read your notes before your letter . . . I made my red ink observations as I went along'. The 'notes' were evidently those written by Harriet Love, containing anecdotes of Peacock and extracts from his letters to her; most of these notes were jotted down for Edith Nicolls in response, as allusions in them show, to L'Estrange's letters of July 7 and 11, which must have been forwarded, or fully quoted, by the recipient to Harriet Love. The notes are of the utmost biographical importance, though some of them are certainly irrelevant, and L'Estrange, with little information to help him to piece them out, complained bitterly of their lameness, and wrote on them, in red ink, such violent comments as 'bosh', 'uncritical and disgusting nonsense', and 'these notes are most tantalizing!' He urged Edith Nicolls, in his letter, not to suppress so cardinal a point as the Fanny Falkner episode, but to 'indicate it briefly with care and skill. . . . If you suppress or exclude all matters of human interest what value do you attach to your notes?' Edith Nicolls had evidently said something about American sales, in view of which he withdrew his objection to *Melincourt*, as it would complete the edition; but he continued to demand personal

¹ Halliford edition, vol. ii, p. 344.

touches: 'Do not publish your "notes" until you make them more "human".'

In a long letter on the following day, written after looking for 'old notes, extracts, and memoranda relating to your Grand-father', he points out that Peacock 'was an elegant and extensive cultivator of Greek far more than an accurate Greek scholar. There are two translations he made from the ninth Pythian ode of Pindar which ought to be corrected.' The former of these was the couplet forming the motto to Chapter XVI of *Crotchet Castle*,

Sprung from what line, adorns the maid
These valleys deep in mountain shade?

After explaining the reasons for Apollo's question, L'Estrange writes:

The real English is 'From what tribe was she [Cyrene] torn away [by bandits] to dwell in the recesses of these shadowy mountains?' It would be better (although not so poetical) to render the passage somewhat in this way:—

Snatched from what clan has been the maid
to dwell in these cleft mountains' shade?

These two lines are editorially bracketed in pencil, with the words 'adopt these', and L'Estrange's couplet is tacitly substituted for Peacock's, at the head of the chapter, in Cole's edition. So summary a method could hardly have been adopted with the other correction, as it would have involved, in Chapter XII of *Gryll Grunge*, a textual alteration in Mr. Falconer's speech beginning 'Hidden are the keys of wise persuasion of sacred endearments'. Here, however, Cole appended to the Greek footnote a tentative '—PINDAR?' and an addition by Edith Nicolls: 'It has been suggested by a scholarly friend that a better translation of this passage would be, "Secret are wise Persuasion's keys to the sacred joys of love" ¹. Sacred because presided over by Eros and Aphrodite.—E. N.'

On August 1 L'Estrange acknowledges 'your favor of yesterday' in an encouraging reply. 'Do not be afraid, and take time. The description of your grandfather in the last

¹ The translation suggested by L'Estrange in his letter.

page of your note is worth all I have seen as yet on the subject put together.'¹ Both in this letter, and in that of the fifth, he asked again the colour of Peacock's hair, and we may fairly ascribe to his insistence the excellent paragraph, in Edith Nicolls's *Notice*, on her grandfather's personal appearance.² The letter also inquires: 'What was Miss F.'s name? Miss Love spells it Annie Falknor and you spell it Fanny Falkner. Take care of this; for the Christian names are quite different.' It may be presumed that his reference, without a query, to 'Miss Fanny Falkner' in the next letter, of August 5, means that this form of the name had been confirmed in Edith Nicolls's reply; and that his subsequent reference to 'Miss Fanny Falkland' (August 10), and 'Miss Falkland' (August 10 and 11) were due to lapse of memory; a transcript of *Newark Abbey*, preserved in a commonplace book kept by Edith Nicolls as a girl, gives the name as 'Fanny Faulkner'. In her *Biographical Notice* she writes: 'Unfortunately, this engagement was broken off in an unjustifiable manner by the underhand interference of a third person,'³ and L'Estrange's letters of September 11 and 15, 1874, show that this version took the place of an earlier and fuller account, censored by L'Estrange, which would probably have disclosed the culprit; on September 15 L'Estrange writes: '“a third party” unites wit and brevity, avoids calumny, and solves the difficulty.' In her old age Mrs. Clarke was only able to say that the third person was one of Fanny Falkner's relatives.

L'Estrange found it increasingly difficult to refrain from taking a hand in the memoir himself. On August 5 he announces his intention 'to seize on the first Sunday I can "lay hold on" to write you a human sketch of your Grandfather, which you can revise, and around which you can accumulate as many short scraps as you please', and on the tenth he objects that 'The opening paragraph of the notes is apologetic and weak, and I have remodeled it entirely—subject to your approval'. Under the spur of his exhortation and criticism,

¹ Section xli of Cole's *Biographical Notes*.

² Cole's edition, vol. i, p. xxxi.

³ *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.

however, Edith Nicolls was making rapid progress as a biographer, and the same letter contains a generous acknowledgement of the 'marvelously improved metamorphosis of the former draft'.

On August 17 L'Estrange has seen her complete manuscript account in its revised form, and writes: 'I return you your "finish", which may be looked upon as in a *decidedly finished state*.¹ It is very well done indeed.' He adds :

When the new draft shall have been in type and revised, if you let me see it I shall have pleasure in giving you my final remarks on it.

I do not know any thing about Mr Cole. But if the former draft were proved to be the work of Homer, or David Hume, I would say it was very badly executed.

By September 7 L'Estrange was writing to give Edith Nicolls an opinion on the *Fraser* article on *Gastronomy and Civilization* which she had sent him; he had not the slightest doubt of its authenticity, and said, with more accuracy than he knew, that 'If any one except your Grandfather wrote it your Grandfather must have transferred all his wit and peculiar views to that writer'. Four days later he returned the article, and with it 'the revise of your biographical notice of your illustrious Grandfather. To me it reads delightfully, and it was certainly an almost Herculean task to metamorphose into their present state the chaos of notes you sent me some three months ago.' His letter contains various suggestions for improvement, both in the notice and in the text, and a passage of some interest on Hogg, who had evidently been greatly annoyed by Peacock's review of his *Life of Shelley*:

So long ago as about the year 1857 I was much delighted with *Headlong Hall*, &c., and when Mr Hogg was named by your Grandfather as a friend in the notice of Shelley I supposed that Mr Hogg was such. Shortly after your Grandfather and I exchanged letters in the spring of 1860 I prevailed on a friend to write to Mr Hogg for some account of your Grandfather, whereupon the friendly Mr Hogg uttered such a howl of execra-

¹ Underlined in red ink.

tion on your Grandfather for the article on Shelley in *Fraser* [sic] for January 1860 that I resolved and determined never again to disturb Mr Hogg's repose.

The letter also gives two textual corrections for the *Memoirs of Shelley* as printed in *Fraser*, both of which Cole tacitly adopted: 'tacturos' (for 'tacturas') in Medwin's Ovidian quotation, and 'thirty-nine' (for 'twenty-nine') as the age of Charles Brockden Brown. L'Estrange had at once accepted Peacock's account of the separation of Shelley and Harriet, and he writes of it now with his usual vigour:

In 1860 I searched into the matter of Shelley and his first wife, and arrived at the conclusion that your Grandfather's version of the story is the only version that can be correct.—The article that appeared in January 1860 when read by Lady Shelley 'caused her nose to have great indignation'. She was unable to reply; but a weakminded young man, named Garnett, took occasion to publish some fragments of Shelley's waste paper,¹ and to assert that the day would come when a full justification of Shelley would be published by some person (as *Punch* would say) 'whose name did not transpire'.

A long and chatty letter on September 15 recurs to Hogg and 'his "Autobiography" which contains some notices of Shelley',² and inquires about others of Shelley's circle in a passage which oddly anticipates Matthew Arnold's 'What a set!' He writes:

But, indeed, the Shelley group were 'a rum lot'. What kind of a youth was Mr Edward Williams who was drowned with Shelley? Some one told me (years ago) that Mr Williams' widow married Hogg. Is this so? What kind of a youth was she?

By the twenty-third he has received an answer, for he writes:

¹ *Relics of Shelley*, published by Richard Garnett in 1862.

² In his next letter, on September 23, he writes: 'I am quite flattered to hear your Grandfather called Hogg's *Life of Shelley* Hogg's own autobiography. So well as I can remember I thought it the silliest book I ever read.'

The two Misses Clairmont were *lads*!

I was surprised when you spoke of *Mrs¹* Hogg; because that implied that Hogg had married some one, and I always understood that 'he was above a thing of that sort'. Some how or other I instinctively hated Hogg, and I now see he was as bad as I thought. But let these riff-raff rest.

The next letter, on September 29, renews the urgent plea of its predecessor for the earlier version of *The Genius*: 'Print the first edition, and let the second go—"where the best of quality goes".' It also contains much gossip about Shelley and his circle, such as :

I never could like Mary W. Godwin, and that Shelley was tired of her has been to me quite plain twenty years ago; because if such were not the case why address such a very ardent love-letter, to Miss Emilia Villanini [sic], as the poem called *Epi-pschydion* [sic]? Poor, illstarred Harriet Shelley was the best of the whole set.

With her reply Edith Nicolls must have enclosed a long letter sent to Peacock by Hobhouse, and still extant among the Clarke papers; a letter, dated Easter 1850, of 19 quarto pages, with enclosures of 22 more, in justification of a note by Hobhouse (disparaging Pietro Aretino) to *Childe Harold*, Canto IV, Stanza LVII. L'Estrange returns it on October 7, and writes a further gossipy letter, full of questions, on the thirteenth :

Please tell me who is Mr Cole? No doubt,
Not to know him argues myself unknown.

Is he the Mr Henry Cole that was connected with the Exhibition of 1851? and of whom Thackeray's Irishman says,

I seen, thank grace, this wondrous place;
His noble honor Misthur
H. Cole it was, that gave the pass,
And let me see what is there.

He asks several questions, also, about the Godwin family—the Clairmonts, and 'Fanny Godwin'—and says of Jane Williams :

Miss Cleveland, otherwise Johnson, otherwise Williams, other-

¹ Underlined in red ink.

wise Hogg was positively grand! Of course there always will be a supply of such exceptional monsters for the monsters of the male sex.

The answer, which reached him on the seventeenth, evidently gave some account of the Godwin relationships, for in a reply on the same day he observes that 'The history of the Godwins resembles that of the Labdacidae!!' Cole and Bentley had made their decision as to the text of *The Genius of the Thames*, and he admits that he 'must let them take their swing', and that as Bentley's 'purse is concerned' (as publisher), he has no business to 'interfere further than give you my "frivolous and vexatious advice"'. He concludes: 'I now wind up my questions and letters until I hear from you again', and his next letter, on January 12, 1875, is written to acknowledge the receipt that afternoon of the three volumes of Cole's edition. His thanks are very cordial, and he praises it as 'really very well printed, edited, and bound'. But 'I shall give you my "judgment", as you call it, on "the new parts".—I think they are all very poor.' He instances the 'ballade of little John' and the translations from Sophocles and Euripides, which 'are not *translations*',¹ they are merely paraphrases . . . the first edition of *The Genius of the Thames* ought to have been preferred to the second', and, in spite of Shelley's praise, 'the second edition of *Palmyra* has been excluded from both the text and the notes'. Fortunately, however, 'the new parts' occupy only a portion of the third volume. 'The preface [by Lord Houghton] is very well written. Of the *Biographical Notice* I need not add any thing to what I have said already.'

Next day he wrote further on the preface and on Peacock's political views, and on the twenty-fifth he sent corrections of two Greek quotations misprinted by Cole in his third volume, pp. 108 and 112, together with a prose translation of the *Choral Ode* from Sophocles (Peacock's 'Alas! that thirst of wealth and power') and 'a metrical version of it made by myself many years ago', in support of his claim that Peacock's versions were defective. He was probably a little anxious about the silence which had followed his letter of the twelfth, and his

¹ Underlined in red ink.

next letter, over a month later, on February 26, shows his relief by its opening:

'A hundred thousand thanks' for the sight of your handwriting. I fancied I had offended you by my strong language, and every morning as I saw the photograph of your Grandfather on my study wall I have reproached myself for having told you the whole truth. The truth is I was utterly disappointed with the new contents in the third volume, and you know 'it is as difficult to hate and be wise as it is to love and be wise'.

Later he adds (not unreasonably):

'My opinion is that the man who corrected the press for that volume did not know the Greek alphabet. I could easily point out monstrous and multitudinous errors in the Greek of the 3rd Vol: alone. But would there be any good in my doing so? I retain the list¹ you have sent me until I hear from you; because I see the corrector has omitted several mistakes that I remember.'

A final passage emphasizes his opinion of Peacock's versions from Greek tragedy:

Regarding his scholarship I sent you a prose translation, and a rugged versification of it, shewing you the meaning of the Chorus from the *Oedipus Coloneus* rendered by your Grandfather and printed in Vol: III, p. 269.

In that same volume, in another place, he renders four words, *μίθοις δ' ἄλλως φερόμεσθα*, 'we are heedlessly carried away by fables', thus:

We trace the mystic legends old
Which ancient dreaming bards have told,
And hear half doubting, half deceived,
The songs our simpler sires believed.²

The fact appears to me to be simply this. Your Grandfather's skill in versification was not surpassed by any English poet with whose works I am acquainted. And when your Grandfather was writing metrical versions of passages in the Greek poets he was 'heedlessly carried away' by the facility and charm of his own beautiful and enchanting versification. I have never seen him praised sufficiently on the score of versification.

¹ Not extant.

² Halliford edition, vol. vii, p. 217.

This is the last of L'Estrange's letters which Edith Nicolls preserved ; perhaps the last she received. The edition was out : it had been discussed : there was no need to prolong a correspondence which had been pleasant enough on both sides. The lady had found a helper whose energy might occasionally have been embarrassing, as his language was certainly unbridled ; but he had put unreservedly at her disposal a sound judgement of the crude *Biographical Notes* of Cole and of her own revision of them, and a classical knowledge which would have saved many editorial blunders in Peacock's text if the proofs of the Greek quotations had been submitted to him. His advice—much of which has necessarily been omitted from this condensed account—had usually been excellent, and the recipient was not ungrateful ; 'Your compliments are too kind', wrote L'Estrange on August 1, 1874, 'but to such service as I can render you are sincerely welcome'. Later that autumn she had asked for his photograph, which was sent on October 7, and is still preserved among her papers, with the date, 'Aug : 1862.', written beneath it in ink by the sender. His own enjoyment of the correspondence is obvious ; it began with genuine good will to a favourite author ; it continued with anxiety for a work which was in danger of miscarriage ; it concluded with a pleasant familiarity with his unseen and youthful correspondent. 'Bringing an old man back to "forty years ago" makes him feel very old if not serious', is the conclusion of his letter of September 29, 1874 : 'nevertheless your letters are delightful.' It is a pity that they have not survived.

There is a characteristic levity and excess in L'Estrange's epistolary style which is apt to obscure the sound common sense of the keen-eyed, long-chinned, thin-lipped Ulster lawyer whose photograph, but little faded, lies before me. I would gladly have printed all his letters as they stand, without omission, as a sign of goodwill to the man and of gratitude for the work of his leisure hours. He took the trouble, while there was yet time, to extract from Peacock—in his old age an unwilling and laconic correspondent—invaluable facts about his education and opinions, his poems and novels, his life and the canon of his works. Later, for no personal advan-

tage, he was at infinite pains to secure the evolution of Cole's disjointed *Notes* into a connected and human memoir, and to bring into it some adequate presentation of Peacock as he lived and as he looked. Without his persistent prompting, Edith Nicolls's *Notice*—if it had ever superseded Cole's *Notes*—would have been far inferior to its present state, and most of Harriet Love's invaluable manuscript jottings would never have been set down for its enrichment, or (where Edith Nicolls suppressed them) for the fuller information of readers of to-day. For the text of the edition he did what he could by correspondence, and had proofs been sent him, would certainly have done more. His reward was the grumbling of Cole and Bentley at his 'frivolous and vexatious advice', and the gratitude of Peacock's grand-daughter. It is a gratitude in which Peacock's biographers might have joined, and in which, perhaps, Peacock's readers may now be persuaded to share.

H. F. B. BRETT-SMITH.

SOME REFLECTIONS OF A POPULAR NOVELIST

WE are producing a great many novels but very few novelists. That is an odd situation for you. I doubt if there ever was a time when more well-written and entertaining new novels were published. People grumble about reviewers of fiction praising too much. But you have to praise; you cannot say work is bad when it happens to be good; and so many of these new novels are very good indeed. They are not masterpieces, but then, who said they were? Masterpieces are never found among brand-new books: it is Time who crowns a masterpiece. But though we are producing so many good new novels, we are not producing a number of outstanding novelists. Perhaps there never were fewer outstanding novelists. When people ask me to name some good novels, I can give them dozens; but when people ask me who our new novelists are, I find it hard to reply. This, you must admit, is very odd indeed. It is absurd to have novels without having novelists. What is happening? The remarks that follow may provide an indirect reply.

The highbrow and the lowbrow are the curse of the reading public to-day. They seem to increase every year, and soon they will grind us writers to small pieces of dust, like the millstones they are. The lowbrow regards a novelist as an entertainer pure and simple, whose task is to concoct a story that will be delightfully unlike life as the readers know it. That reader wants an escape, and you cannot blame him or, more frequently, her. As a matter of fact, all literature is an escape. It is other things as well, but it is an escape. There is a special section of the public—the people for ever in search of a message—that furiously denounces this escape motive, but actually those people are farther away from an appreciation of literature proper than the escapers. (For example, they are farther away from Shakespeare, who, with his idyllic forests, fairy-haunted woods, blasted heaths, enchanted

islands, was a very cunning master of the escape business.) It is a great mistake to think that these lowbrows who see fiction as a dreamy entertainment are unintelligent persons. Frequently, they are people with quite massive intellects. I have known several very distinguished scientists, for example, who frankly declared that they liked a novel 'to cheer them up', to take them 'out of ordinary sordid life', who were, in short, all in favour of novels as enormous sugar-plums. I myself have been seriously rebuked by men of famous intelligence for not providing them with 'happy endings'. The point is, of course, that these people do not take fiction seriously, and leave their intellect in the laboratory or the consulting room when they turn to literature. They and their kind are responsible for the enormous vogue of the detective story, which, though it pretends to deal with death and the most terrible motives, provides a complete escape from reality.

The highbrow public is very small but has a good deal of influence. The novelists that please it soon begin to seem important, even to many people who do not like their work. It is a public that has always existed, but it is marked by different characteristics at different times. Recently it has been chiefly marked by a peevish distaste for life. This is probably due to the fact that this public is largely made up of mal-adjusted, neurotic individuals. Novels that favour this peevish distaste for life are singled out by this public as 'intelligent' works of fiction: these may range from wittily cynical tales to exhibitions of the gloomiest bestiality. Young men and women who have not been very successful in their various attempts at work, whose private lives are in a sad muddle, find comfort in novels by people of their own kind, novels that fritter away the significance of life, offer a refuge from the attacks of common sense criticism, and confirm the reader in his or her desire to avoid any real effort. And then again, the members of this public are determined not to share any enthusiasm with the rest of the community, so that a wide popularity is fatal to a novelist's reputation in these circles. (Consider the history of Mr. Galsworthy's reputa-

tion.) However contemptuous a writer may be of the individuals themselves, no novelist with any intelligence can pretend to be indifferent to the shrill clamour of this highbrow public, whose members are all articulate and take a delight in expressing their opinions. They are a nuisance. And I am sorry to add that Cambridge, which when it undertakes to produce an insufferable type does it very thoroughly, has become the favourite breeding-ground of these creatures.

If either the lowbrow or highbrow public had its way, it would fix a novelist's mood for ever. This is a new horror that has been added to the life of a literary man. Whatever mood he writes out of now, he must automatically displease one section of the reading public. If Shakespeare were writing now, he would be sneered at by one mob for being cheerful, fantastic, idyllic, in his *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*, and then roundly cursed by another mob for losing his cheerfulness and showing signs of pessimism in his *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. He was fortunate in his period, however, for it did not occur to the Elizabethans that a creative artist must remain fixed in one attitude. When Shakespeare felt that life was a roaring farce, he wrote scenes of roaring farce, and when he fell into moods of black exasperation, he wrote out of them, sending up into the sunlight his fountains of bitter words. We have now reached the age of standardization, even in literature, and the highbrows, with their demand for a constant peevishness, are just as bad as the lowbrows, with their demand for constant high spirits. If this creative freedom was good enough for Shakespeare, it is good enough for the rest of us. Already, in a very short life as a novelist and dramatist, I have been heartily damned for my high spirits, my low spirits, for my optimism, my pessimism, for being too robustly realistic, for being too fantastic, for describing life as it is, for not describing life as it is, and as I propose to go on in the way I began, that is, to write in the particular way that excites me and spurs me on at the particular time of writing, to enjoy myself first whether anybody else enjoys me or not afterwards, I am quite prepared for more and more and heartier damns from every

quarter, until at last I drop into the grave, mourned by nobody outside the printing trade. By that time, the whole thing will be completely standardized: the mood in which a man writes his first novel will then determine the nature of all his work: they will all be in numbered categories; and reviewers will be provided with a simple little chart, showing where everybody is. And it will be very pleasant being dead.

If the spirit of that robust personality, Anthony Trollope (the scorn of all late Victorian highbrows), is still able to take an interest in our affairs, he must be gratified by the praise he is being given now. He must also be sorry, being the sound professional man of letters he was and perhaps is, for the predicament in which his brother novelists now find themselves. He knows, nobody better, what can be done by any industrious and intelligent novelist who has as part of his material a settled state of society. Such a novelist can see his people against a background. That background was changing, of course, in Trollope's time, and in his later works, those changes were part of his theme. But in his day it was still a reasonably ordered background, and not a mad kaleidoscope. You are a novelist and you would like to write a large leisurely tale, embodying the subdued tragi-comedy of our social life. You would like it to cover about twenty years. Well, you will have to begin in 1912. Only twenty years ago? Never! 1912 was Before the War, and a thousand years ago. Nevertheless, you will have a shot at it—1912. But then, almost immediately, you find yourself and all your characters in the War, and nearly four and a half years of it. You cannot dodge the War. It is there in your path like a colossal mountain range. But, you do not want to write a War Novel, and yet you will have to write about the War. Even then your troubles have not ended. You come to the immediate Post-War period, a very special and difficult time that has an atmosphere all its own. Get your people into that atmosphere and you will probably never get them out of it. (I always feel that Mr. Aldous Huxley's novels belong to the period 1920-22 and never quite succeed in leaving it.) By this time the projected novel seems all background.

When we come to our own time, we are no better off. At present there is a Slump, and people are gloomy, losing money, unemployed. Some experts say that the whole system is running down, and that we must either plan or perish. (I incline to this view myself, though God knows I am no expert.) Other experts say that this is a temporary decline, the result of War Debts, Reparations, Gold, and the rest, and that very soon everybody will be working hard again. I do not know what is going to happen, and you don't, and neither do the experts. If you are a novelist who prefers a wide sweep—and not of the feminine variety, the It-all-happened-in-Margaret's-mind—that-Sunday-afternoon kind—then you are bound to take in this Slump; but while you are actually writing, the Slump may suddenly smooth itself away or may equally suddenly blow up into ruin and revolution. Meanwhile, it is too early yet to write at length about the pre-Slump period, because it is essential to see that period as a movement in a certain direction and until we know more of where this Slump is landing us, we cannot determine that direction. You may say that this is taking us a long way from the novel, but if you do, then you are wrong. The novelist who likes a wide sweep has to take all these things into account. Trollope himself, a novelist pure and simple if ever there was one, would be bewildered by this present situation, and would have wondered where to start or if to start at all.

Some novelists belong to the High Priest of Art school of thought. (They are frequently invalids with private means.) To them it does not matter what is happening in the world. They are secure in their ivory towers, happily busy all day eliminating an adjective and brooding over a dubious semi-colon. They do not read newspapers. They do not worry about East Prussia and Manchuria, tariffs and the Means Test. They have their own Five Year Plan, and so do not bother about Russia's. They are real artists, apparently more sensitive than the rest of us, though sometimes it seems to us that it is they who are horribly insensitive. (Some of them succeeded in ignoring the War, which must have taken a bit

of doing. They won't ignore the next, if there ever is one: that we can promise them.) But for the rest of us, who are not secure in our ivory towers, who do read newspapers, who cannot help worrying over a world that is now in a dreadful muddle, this is a queer time for novels and novel-writing. Do not mistake me: I do not mean that this is no time for imaginative literature, that writers should take to blue prints and tractors, that novels must wait for calmer weather. I am considering the situation now from the novelist's point of view. A certain amount of security, not simply material but also mental, spiritual, is necessary for the creation of a work of art. No doubt there is something exhilarating about finding oneself seated on the slope of an active volcano, the top of which might blow up at any moment; but it does not help a man to write good novels. This, you may object, is an exaggeration. We will put it in a lower key then. A novelist should be a fairly sensitive, reasonably well-informed man, who is deeply concerned with what is happening to his fellow creatures, whose bewilderment, exasperation, despair, cannot possibly be ignored. Every time he looks at a newspaper, reads a book on the affairs of the world, or even talks seriously to a man in some other walk of life, he is made to realize that civilized humanity is going through some great crisis. He wants to help. His sympathy is pulled this way and that. The deep concentration his work demands is difficult to achieve. When I sometimes catch a glimpse of the productions of the Soviet's corps of propagandist writers, I feel no envy; but I will confess that there are times when I envy their state of mind.

Before I begin writing another novel, I should like to find a new method of narration, a form that would excite me. Not because I write so much but probably because I read so much fiction, I am tired of the usual form of the novel. The ordinary devices of the narrator now seem horribly tedious. I think that is one reason why I have recently taken to writing plays: it is a pleasant change to get rid of narration altogether for a time. I find the 'stream of consciousness' method, the method associated with Miss Dorothy Richard-

son, Mr. James Joyce, and Mrs. Virginia Woolf, even more tiresome than the conventional mixed method, partly subjective, partly objective. It is very easy to do badly, and even when done well, as it has been by the three novelists above, a little of it goes a long way with me. It is easily the *sloppiest* of all methods in fiction, and once you are acquainted with it, once you have recovered from the first delightful shock of surprise, its sloppiness soon begins to annoy you. Moreover, this method very severely restricts your scope in the novel: it always reminds me of some slatternly woman who slops about the house all day in kimono and bedroom slippers, being too lazy to bath, change, and go out to have a look at the world. The writers who have done most with this method all seem to me people who are not really novelists at all, but fantastic monologuists and prose poets, like Mrs. Woolf and Mr. Joyce. The latter declared at one time that the novel was beginning all over again with him, but from my experience of the fiction of the newest generation, it seems to me that his influence is very small indeed and is actually waning. And Mrs. Woolf is, very wisely, more admired than imitated.

It might be fun to go in the opposite direction, producing novels that were completely objective in manner, novels made up entirely of description and dialogue, with not a glimpse of anybody's mind in them. Mr. Ernest Hemingway has done this, of course, but very much in his own intensely individual manner, which is a fine instrument for his own purpose but should be avoided by any one else. No, the kind of objective novel I have in mind would be not unlike the scenario of a talking film, with its alternations of dialogue and description and its frequent changes of locality. With that you could present a wide scene. The modern novel has moved in two directions, inward with the 'stream of consciousness' writers, and outward, that is, taking in the largest possible number of people as characters. This extensive method is very characteristic of our time: all these novels about hotels, boarding houses, ships, offices, and so on, that show you quick successive glimpses of the lives of all the people concerned,

are examples of this extensive method. Obviously it fulfils some particular need of our own time, and may possibly be a protest against the tendency, inevitable in an elaborate social organization, to turn human beings into abstractions. These novels do not tell you a great deal about anybody, but they do succeed in humanizing, so to speak, what was before merely a part of the social machinery. They have too, of course, a strong behind-the-scenes interest. I suspect that these novels are easy to do passably well, but hard to turn into literature.

In spite of some failures on my own part, I still cling to the belief I held when I first started writing fiction, that the way of salvation for the contemporary novel, which if it becomes lost in subjectivity ceases to be a novel and yet must have its subjective interests, its drama of the mind and soul, is through some kind of dramatic symbolism, in narratives that would move in more than one world at once. Most of the modern novels that have excited my deepest interest seem to me to have been symbolical. (Mann's *Magic Mountain* is a fairly good example of what I mean, though in places he abandons any pretence of ordinary realistic narrative, and the long debates in the middle chapters are out of key.) But I do not like the kind of story, of which there are several contemporary German examples, in which the narrative of outward events is preposterous in itself and means nothing at all until you understand its symbolism. Thus, suppose you have a story of a man trying to save his house. The house, we will say, is really a symbol of the man's soul. But it will not do, I argue, if the story is ridiculous when the house is seen as a house and not as a soul; better to write about the soul and have done with it. No, it ought to be possible to enjoy the narrative as an account of a man's adventures with his house. What you are after, of course, is the appeal on several different levels at the same time. That is why *Don Quixote* is such a colossal achievement, and may be regarded as the pattern of all fiction. I will confess, here and now, that this is what I have always been after in novels, and I will also confess that I have never succeeded, though

I believe I have come nearer to success with a small number of readers than most reviewers, who are usually in too much of a hurry, would allow. Compared with this task, I consider the ordinary antics of so-called 'intellectual' novelists, the 'stream of consciousness' people, the writers who cram in chunks of erudition, the elaborate hair-splitters, to be so much child's play; though I will admit at once that these novelists do what they set out to do more successfully than I do. Probably, my trouble is that no matter how carefully I plan, a cheerful and robust common sense, or, if you insist, downright commonplaceness of outlook, will come in. It seems I have not a distinguished and fastidious mind; and once I am fairly set in a novel, I begin to enjoy myself, and the sight of my enjoying myself is apparently not pleasing to people who really have distinguished and fastidious minds. So I shall remain a 'popular novelist' even when—and this is more than likely—I have long ceased to be popular.

Well, I will take this opportunity of speaking my mind while I am still a fairly popular 'popular novelist'. At the present time, everybody is encouraged to write novels but nobody is encouraged to be a novelist. This is a ridiculous situation. It amounts to this, that if you want to knock off a novel or two—to add to your income, to tell that story about your Aunt Kate, to score off the So-and-So's, to make use of your experience at such-and-such—then publishers, reviewers, the reading public, will all encourage you. Thus we can all write novels now, and not bad ones either. But knocking off a novel or two is not being a novelist. And the real novelist, whose work and whose play it is to express himself or herself in fiction, is far from being encouraged. Nearly all the peculiar conditions of our time are discouraging. Some of them I have dealt with already. But there are others. Publishers are more and more inclined to take short views; they are not so anxious now to pick out some writers of solid and growing merit and to build up a solid list with their works; they want quick returns, snap successes, a big seller for one month; and they tend to think from book to book and not in terms of growing lists and emerging careers.

The criticism of new fiction is now so organized that though it may be of value to the publisher, the bookseller, the public, it is of no value to the novelist. There is, to begin with, not enough space given to it. Most literary periodicals still treat fiction as if it was very light-weight stuff, and will herd it into a column of 'New Novels' when at the same time they will give acres of valuable space to the consideration of third-rate biographies, memoirs, travel books, and even the productions of notorious hacks, all of which is still thought of as 'Serious Literature'. I myself have written little books of criticism, done in a few weeks, that received six times as much space from reviewers as large novels of mine that took months and months of hard work. If you are lucky, you can write novels and receive for them a good deal of praise and a good deal of money, and I for one do not quarrel with either. But what an artist wants first of all is serious consideration, and I doubt if any novelist at the present time is getting any serious consideration. And if you are 'popular'—that is, if a great many people decide to buy your books—then you may depend upon it that in certain circles, supposed to consist of people who are interested in literature, your last chance is gone.

The very term 'popular novelist' is beginning to look like an insult. Why? The novel, whether you like it or not, is one of the most vital literary forms of this age, and in no other field of letters is competition for public notice so fierce. To have won a popularity that includes the suffrages of a good many intelligent persons is to have achieved something. Therefore, I for one am tired of these constant sneers at 'popular novelists' indulged in by second-rate critics, miscellaneous scribblers, parsons, and lawyers, who have never exerted themselves in all their lives as much as they would have to do if they tried to carry through one good chapter of a novel, popular or otherwise. This attitude towards novels and novelists is not a new thing, the result of a glut of fiction and a drop in its standard; it is an old silly snobbery that ought to have been buried generations ago. I have heard it said that novels are produced for the benefit of idle

women. That is not my experience. I get more letters from men—and not idle men either—than I do from women readers, though I imagine that men are less given to writing to strange authors than women are. And there is nothing in these letters to make one ashamed of such popularity as one may have. I often find myself in almost complete disagreement with their writers—as I have suggested earlier—but I am nearly always glad to learn that such people have spent so much of their leisure with me. But there are times when I wonder if they will spend much more of their leisure with any fiction of mine, for though I still like writing novels—and merely to think of the new territory to be occupied, conquered, governed, is a delight—I am not sure I enjoy being a novelist, especially when the alternative to being a popular novelist is being an unpopular one, an embittered gentleman who hasn't a good word for anybody. Have I said enough? I suspect that I have said far too much. *Hold, or cut bow-strings.*

J. B. PRIESTLEY.

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